8-2017

Teacher Perceptions of the Effectiveness of the Response to Intervention Framework with English Learners

Donna Stapleton
East Tennessee State Universtiy

Teacher Perceptions of the Effectiveness of the Response to Intervention Framework with English Learners

---

A dissertation

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership And Policy Analysis

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

---

by

Donna Cartwright-Stapleton

August 2017

Dr. William Flora, Chair

Dr. Pamela Mims

Dr. Pamela Scott

Dr. Stephanie Tweed

Keywords: Response to Intervention, English Learners, Socio-cultural Theory

ABSTRACT

Teacher Perceptions of the Effectiveness of the Response to Intervention Framework with English Learners

by

Donna Cartwright-Stapleton

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine teacher perceptions of the effectiveness of the Response to Intervention (RtI) framework with students who are acquiring English as a second language.

Students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds have been disproportionately represented in special education programs for decades (Artiles & Trent, 1994; Donovan & Cross, 2002; Heller, Holtzman, & Messick, 1982). RtI was believed to be a framework through which the number of inappropriate EL referrals for special education services could be reduced. Ten elementary teachers in a small/medium sized rural school district in East Tennessee participated in semi-structured interviews intended to examine their perceptions of the effectiveness of the RtI framework when implemented with ELs. The researcher analyzed the responses for emergent themes. These themes included knowledge about the purpose of the framework, the impact of leadership upon implementation of the framework, training and professional development around teaching ELs and responding to their unique needs, and understanding differences between challenges arising from language acquisition versus those arising from a learning disability. Findings and recommendations for practice are included.

DEDICATION

This is dedicated to my wonderful husband, Gene. God has blessed me beyond belief for allowing me to spend my life with you. Through our years together you have been my biggest supporter, my source of encouragement and my best friend. You have made so many of my dreams come true and I am grateful to you for allowing me to realize my dream of earning a doctorate. Your faith in me never waivered and your commitment to supporting me never faltered, even when I wanted to quit. I look forward to spending time with you without distraction of deadlines or frustration of writer's block. I promise you'll never have to travel with "my book bags" again.

Thank you my honey. I love you --- but it's so much more than that!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my appreciation to the faculty in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis at East Tennessee State University. Their personalized approach motivated me and their commitment to excellence inspired me throughout the program. I am especially grateful to Dr. Bill Flora, my dissertation chair, for his words valuable feedback and kind words of encouragement. I also wish to express my gratitude to the other members of my committee. Dr. Pamela Mims, Dr. Pamela Scott, and Dr. Stephanie Tweed, all of whom shared their wisdom as instructional leaders, and served as role models to me throughout the dissertation process.

I also like to to give to express my gratitude to my supervisor and friend, Mrs. Kim Greenway. She not only offered encouragement and enthusiasm, she made sure we shared at least one laugh each day during my dissertation process. She embodies servant leadership. Finally, I want to express my appreciation to Dr. Jason Vance for his guidance and encouragement throughout my dissertation journey, and for the support and leadership he provides as Director of Schools.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

For decades, educators at state and local level have tried to ensure all students receive a free and appropriate education (FAPE). In 1968, the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights (OCR) began conducting a biennial survey of elementary and secondary schools in the United States. The data provided by the surveys was disaggregated by student demographic characteristics and revealed a disparity in patterns of student placement in special education program. In 2004, legislators and stakeholders recognized disproportionate representation of and an imbalanced curriculum implementation with certain demographic groups, specifically English learners, in special education programs (Rueda & Windmueller, 2006). To address these issues educators, stakeholders, and policymakers began exploring more effective instructional methods to meet the unique needs of the increasingly culturally and linguistically diverse student population in the United States (NCLB, 2002).

Authors of the 2002 reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) outlined more rigorous standards. State education leaders were required to ensure high quality research based instruction to support the development of foundational academic skills. These more rigorous standards were aimed at improving the performance of all students on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and annual statewide achievement tests. In response to this mandate, (DOE) in states across the nation implemented the Response to Intervention (RtI) framework.

RtI is a framework for instructional support implemented by teachers and administrators to monitor student response to instructional methods, examine student data and modify the instructional approaches to address the individual needs of each student (Burns & Gibbons,

2012). The first step of the framework is the screening of every student to determine their academic abilities and challenges. The results of this screening process are used by teachers to target the level of support each student requires. Student progress in the prescribed intervention is monitored and measured, and recommendations are made for movement among the tiers (Tier 1, 2, 3 and/or 4). Tier 1 refers to the general classroom setting and is the lowest intensity of inteverntion. Tier 3 and/or 4 refers to the highest intensity of intervention which is delivered to the smallest group of students. Each tier is increasingly intensive and individualized based on student response to the interventions (Hoover & Patton, 2008). When students fail to make progress or show growth, despite receiving highest intensity of intervention, a referral for special education evaluation may be made.

This is particularly problematic for English learners who are often referred for special education evaluation. The failure to show growth or respond positively to interventions by English learners is often a result of language difference, not learning disability. In fact, recent research suggests that educators are having a very difficult time distinguishing between the difficulty of acquiring a second language and a learning disability (Klingner & Harry, 2006; Lesaux, 2006; McCardle, Mele-McCarthy, Cutting, Leos & D'Emilio, 2005; Wagner Francis & Morris, 2005).

The guidelines for RtI are flexible. Educators at state and local agencies have discretion as to how they implement the model (Thomas & Zirkel, 2010). Because of the flexibility allowed, it is not clear how many state education leaders have and to what degree each has implemented the RtI framework but it is estimated leaders of more than 30 state DOEs have implemented the framework to some degree (Thomas & Zirkel, 2010). Educators in districts throughout the State of Tennessee have implemented a three tier model, referred to as RtI^2

(Response to Instruction and Intervention), as a preventive instructional intervention and pre-referral tool (Tennessee Department of Education (TnDOE), 2013). The framework includes guidelines for student transition between tiers. Leaders of individual school districts have discretion as to how to implement the model. Leaders within individual schools adapt the implementation to meet the needs of their student population.

Despite the flexibility allowed, Klingner and Orosco (2010) expressed concern the RtI model is implemented with a one-size-fits-all approach. This blanket approach conflicts with the intended preventive nature of RtI, to provide scientific research-based instruction that is differentiated to meet the needs of all learners, including students who are classified as English learners (ELs).

Leaders within the Tennessee Department of Education describe RtI^2 as a framework for teaching and learning (TnDOE, 2013). The classroom teacher serves as content and pedagogical expert, student advocate, and facilitator to "implement with fidelity the established procedures for delivering high quality instruction and intervention" (TnDOE, p. 32). Fullan and Hargreaves (1996) identified classroom teachers as being the single most important factor for student success. Carney and Stiefel (2008) indicated that classroom teachers are responsible for identifying students and effective interventions, collecting data, and providing necessary guidance for the implementation of RtI in the school to ensure the needs of students at risk for academic failure are met. Yet, the focus of much of the extant research surrounding RtI implementation with ELs is quantitative and centered on the manner in which the researcher, not the classroom teacher, applied the framework (Linan-Thompson & Ortiz, 2009). Given the important role teachers play in student success, the focus of inquiry must move from controlled research to a natural classroom setting.

Further, much of the existing research examines the effectiveness of specific programs as interventions. Research must likewise shift from the evaluation of specific interventions by the researcher to the holistic implementation of the framework by classroom teachers.

This current study includes an exploration of the process and strategies teachers use to decide to serve ELs through the RtI framework. Further study of how teachers consider the academic and linguistic needs of ELs in the RtI referral process will provide direction for schools and improve the effectiveness of RtI with linguistically diverse groups (Linan-Thompson, Cirino & Vaughn, 2007).

Background of the Study

Forty years ago, the Supreme Court of the United States determined that schools must take affirmative steps to ensure that EL students can access services and meaningfully participate in educational programs (Lau v. Nichols, 1974) to demonstrate to compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VI). The same year, Congress enacted the Equal Educational Opportunities Act (EEOA), which reasserted that state and local education agencies take intentional steps to overcome language barriers that prevent students access to content and instruction.

Schools across the United States have experienced significant demographic shifts in student enrollment in recent decades. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), Common Core of Data state level statistics for school year 2013, 48% of student enrolled in kindergarten through twelfth grade in U. S. public schools identified as a race other than Caucasian/White (IES, 2016). ELs are now enrolled in nearly three out of every four public schools in the nation. ELs represented 8.4% of all public school students in the U.S. in 2001-2002 (IES, 2016a & U. S. Dept. of Ed., 2016). In 2013, they represented greater than 9% of all

public school students, and their numbers continue to increase. There were an estimated 3,977,819 EL students in grades K-12 in U.S. public schools in the 2001-2002 school year, as compared with the estimate of 2,314,079 EL students for the 1991-1992 school year, an increase of 72% in the EL population. Adding to the shift in cultural, ethnic and linguistic characteristics, the percentage of children served by federally supported special education programs increased from 8.3% to 12.9% between 1976–1977 and 2012–2013. Much of this increase can be attributed to a rise in the percentage of students identified as having specific learning disabilities (SLD) from 1976–77 (1.8%) to 2004–05 (5.7%).

Public Law 94-142 was passed into law as the Education of All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) in 1977. The goal of EAHCA was to provide children with disabilities the same opportunity for education as those students who do not have a disability (Wright & Wright, 2007). The act established procedures for referring, evaluating, and placing students into special education programs. Ysseldyke, Algozzine, and Thurlow (2000) suggested that controversy centered on procedures for determining eligibility has surrounded this law since it was mandated in 1975. Evidence of disproportionate minority student identification and participation in special education programs highlighted the ongoing concern regarding the inequitable identification of cultural and linguistically diverse students (Baca & deValenzuela, 1998).

The EAHCA was reauthorized in 1990 as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (P.L.101-46). IDEA required the use of nonbiased assessment for determining special education eligibility for ELs, and language was added requiring that students with disabilities receive instruction in the least restrictive environment (LRE) (Ovando, Combs, & Collier, 2006). Artiles and Trent (1994) cited research questioning the validity of IQ tests with ELs and conducted an analysis of identification and placement patterns of ELs in special education

programs. The study pointed to disproportionate representation of ELs in special education programs, both overrepresentation (Artiles & Trent, 1994) and underrepresentation (Carrasquillo, 1990; Robertson, Kushner, Starks, & Drescher, 1994).

Authors of amendments to IDEA in 1997 (P. L. 105-17) brought increased awareness to the disparate representation of minority students in specific special education categories (Artiles & Ortiz, 2002). Legislators responsible for the passage of IDEA 1997 also addressed rights of ELs to unbiased assessment and identification procedures in the native language, the right of parents to an interpreter for meetings, and the inclusion of English as a Second/Other Language (ESOL) teachers on the team (Artiles & Ortiz, 2002). State education leaders were required to collect statistics regarding ethnicity, race, language and special education placement and to monitor this information for indications of disproportionate representation of minority students (OSEP, 1997).

In 2004, IDEA was reauthorized as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Action (IDEIA 2004) (P.L. 108-446). While both the original law and the 2004 reauthorization defined special education as "specially designed instruction…to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability," the reauthorization in 2004 transformed special education across the country. This reauthorization reinforced federal mandates for teacher quality and accountability included in the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) (P. L. 107-110) in 2002. Additionally, IDEIA directed changes to procedures for identifying students for participation in special education programs, particularly in the category of specific learning disability. Specific learning disability is as defined in IDEIA as:

> A disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, speak, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations, including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and

> developmental aphasia. The term does not apply to children who have learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, of mental retardation, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage [20 U.S.C. §1401 (301)].

Authors of the original law outlined criteria for identifying students as learning disabled as the existence of a significant difference between a child's achievement and intelligence measure. Fletcher, Foorman, Francis, Lyon, Shayvitz, and Stuebing (1998) and Aaron (1997) posited this discrepancy model failed to prevent students from experiencing significant academic failure. The updated IDEIA 2004 moved away from using IQ as the sole determinant to using data connected to student performance including academic achievement, teacher observation of student function in the classroom (Hollenbeck, 2007), and measuring student response to scientific, research-based intervention (Fuchs, 2003). These recommendations were viewed as a more equitable means by which to identify ELs believed to have a learning disability (Wilkinson, Ortiz, Robertson, & Kushner, 2006).

This shift resulted in the development of a framework by which to ensure high quality research based classroom instruction, monitor and measure students response to that instruction and recommended interventions. The framework, referred to as Response to Intervention (RtI) was designed to allow the consideration of the impact of contextual factors on student learning. RtI was intended as a safety net for struggling learners, through the use of tiered interventions (Fuchs et al., 2003). Whereas the discrepancy model waited for students to demonstrate resounding failure before they received help, the idea behind RtI is to catch students when they begin to struggle and provide focused instruction differentiated to meet each student's unique needs (Harris-Murri, King, & Rostenberg, 2006).

Fuchs, Mock,Morgan and Young (2003) describe RtI as a model by which to monitor student progress over time through the use of multiple measures to prescribe interventions to

address students' academic deficits. RtI was designed as a multi-tiered approach for providing support and intervention to all at-risk students (Greenfield, Rinaldi, Proctor, & Cardarelli, 2010). It was strongly recommended for use with ELs as a way to decrease inappropriate referrals for special education evaluation (Fuchs et al., 2003).

Tier 1 includes ensuring high quality research based instruction and monitoring student learning in the general education classroom. When measures indicate student response is not adequate, Tier 2 intervention is provided in small groups, differentiated as needed. Students making less than adequate progress in Tier 2 may be moved to a Tier 3 (or 4) intervention, which is skill-based instruction delivered in smaller groups. Students that do not demonstrate progress or growth in Tier 3 (or 4) may be referred for evaluation to determine eligibility for special education support (Rinaldi & Samson, 2008).

IDEIA 2004 afforded states the option to use RtI to identify students with a learning disability, however, there is insufficient research examining the use of RtI with ELs (Orosco & Klingner, 2010) or the use of alternate processes for ELs who are believed to have learning disability. According to Berkeley et al. (2009), Hollenbeck (2007), and Thomas and Zirkel (2010), the flexibility state education leaders are allowed to design and implement RtI pose challenges as well as opportunities. Because there is no proven model regarding number of tiers, duration of interventions, and appropriate interventions at each tier (Berkeley, Bender, Peaster, & Sanders, 2009; Hollenbeck, 2007; Thomas & Zirkel, 2010), there is a lack of consistency in the types of data collected and the interpretation of the data to describe a student's academic abilities. Cardarelli, Proctor, and Rinaldi (2010) and Miller (2008) suggested teachers are not highly effective in assessing and monitoring student progress, or providing interventions beyond Tier 1. As a result, many schools provide the same interventions to ELs as are given to English-

speaking populations, ignoring students' English proficiency level. The ambiguity resulting from a lack of clear English acquisition standards, coupled with inconsistencies in implementation, raises questions about challenges for students of linguistically diverse cultures and urges the need for further research surrounding the effectiveness of RtI decision making framework with ELs (Elizalde-Utnick, 2008).

Some studies conducted on ELs and special education referral vary in topic and scope. There is considerable research on the various factors that influence the referral of ELs to special education (Barrera, 2006; Hardin, Peisner-Feinberg, & Roach-Scott, 2007; Lesaux & Samson, 2009), which includes research on teacher knowledge, language acquisition, cultural differences, and socioeconomic status (SES). Although these studies contributed to the knowledge regarding ELs and students with special needs, the studies did not address the effectiveness of monitoring, measuring and intervention practices. Foorman et al. (1997) suggested that academic success of ELs with a learning disability is positively impacted by early identification, and ELs substantially benefit from research based instruction and individualized supports prior to or instead of being referred. Wilkinson et al. (2006) contended that although effective pre-referral practices can be associated with a decreased number of ELs being inappropriately referred or misidentified, educators may lack the training or resources to use these pre-referral supports with ELs.

In 2000, Conway, conducted a study of principals' perceptions which indicated teachers were often unwilling or unable to implement interventions with ELs because they lack knowledge, training and resources. Wilkinson et al. (2006) analyzed multi-year data of special education identification patterns with ELs and found evidence to suggest the lack of pre-referral intervention often resulted in misidentification of ELs as learning disabled. Artiles, Rueda,

Salazar and Higareda (2005) and Parrish (2002) studied the representation of ELs in special education programs, and suggested that ELs are disproportionally represented in disability categories, specifically: intellectual disability (ID), learning disability (LD), and speech and language impairments. In a similar study, students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds were found to be disproportionately represented in special education programs (Chinn & Hughes, 1987; Parrish, 2002).

Several studies corroborate the consistent disproportionality throughout the United States for the past 40 years (Donovan & Cross, 2002; Hosp & Reschly, 2004; MacMillan & Reschly, 1998; Oswald, Coutinho, Best, & Singh, 1999). This disproportionate representation raised questions about the placement of ELs in special education programs. Hopstock and Stephenson (2003) examined the participation of ELs in special education categories during the 2000-2001 school year and concluded that ELs represent 7.9% of students in special education programs as compared to 12.4% for all students. Less than 4.6% of ELs were identified as learning disabled as compared to 6.1% of all students. In a study of special education identification patterns among ELs, McCardle, Mele-McCarthy, Cutting, Leos, and D'Emilio (2005) found that proper and timely identification of ELs with learning disability is often challenged by similarities between characteristics of learning disabilities and the second language acquisition (SLA) process. Distinguishing between SLA and learning disability in ELs is among the most difficult challenges educators face (Rinaldi & Samson, 2008). As a result, ELs with learning disabilities are often identified for eligibility later than native English speaking students. This suggests that ELs may be inappropriately placed in special education programs because of their limited English fluency and resultant low academic achievement in English. Conversely, ELs with special needs may not be considered for special education services based on the belief that

academic challenges are entirely attributed to the student's low level of English proficiency. IDEIA excluded from its definition of specific learning disability, those learning disabilities which result from cultural disadvantage. Artiles (2003) attributed cultural differences between educators and ELs as potentially contributing to an increased inappropriate referral of ELs for special education services. Brown (2004) linked the disproportionate representation to the impact of cultural differences upon students' linguistic performance and language use. Further, Lehr and McComas (2005) posited that teachers' sub-consciously held cultural bias and racial stereotypes add to the misidentification of ELs. While many teachers argue that added support can only enhance the student's acquisition of English, inaccurately identifying EL students' as learning disabled and subsequent placement in special education classes deprives students of access to core academic instruction (Klingner et al., 2005). Foorman et al. (1997) stated that increased intervention and support has been linked to increased retention rates and improved academic outcomes and emphasized that timely and proper identification positively affects academic success of ELs. Either failing to identify or inappropriately identifying ELs as learning disabled can have a detrimental impact on the hastened academic growth ELs must make to perform on a level equal to their grade level peers (Fletcher & Navarrete, 2003).

Statement of the Problem

Educators throughout the United States have historically struggled in the identification of ELs with learning disabilities. This challenge can been seen by examining patterns of disproportionate representation over recent decades (Artiles et al., 2005). IDEIA 2004 allowed policymakers in state DOEs the option of using the RtI framework to identify students with specific learning disability [20 U.S.C. 1414 (b)(6)], and recommended the use of pre-referral intervention to decrease disproportionate representation and improve academic achievement of

ELs (Artiles & Ortiz, 2002; Foorman et al., 1997). Nonetheless, the research examining schools' effectiveness in implementing RtI as a means to identify ELs believed to be learning disabled is limited (Orosco & Klingner, 2010).

It is not clearly understood how elementary school teachers make decisions regarding EL referrals within the RtI framework. The focus of much of the standing research surrounding RtI implementation with ELs is quantitative and centered on the manner in which the researcher, not the classroom teacher applied the framework (Klingner & Edwards, 2006). Teachers use the RtI framework to deliver individualized instruction to students who are not performing on grade level. However, Klingner and Orosco (2010) asserted that implementation of RtI "tends to be applied with a 'one-size-fits all' mentality without consideration of issues of population" (p. 271). This can be disadvantageous to students of sub-groups such as ELs who enter the classroom with needs uncharacteristic of their non-EL peers. Although there is ample research regarding the use of RtI with ELs, there is little research on the decision-making process teachers apply when referring students for interventions.

Although RtI has been implemented in school districts nationwide, teachers continue to struggle to meet the needs of non-English or limited English speaking students in the classroom. Response to this challenge has resulted in teachers frequently refering ELs to special education to ensure students receive additional support and ease personal accountability concerns (Damico, Hamayan, Marler, & Sanchez-Lopez, 2010). Consequently, ELs are frequently incorrectly identified as learning disabled while underlying learning deficits remain undiagnosed (Lesaux & Samson, 2009; Rueda & Windmueller, 2006; Sullivan, 2011). Although current qualitative research surrounding the use of RtI with ELs is limited, studies indicate that RtI is not effective with ELs largely because teachers do not understand ESOL methodology or pedagogy

or the impact of culture and contextual factors on academic performance (Orosco & Klingner, 2010**).**

The current study is intended to examine teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of the RtI decision making framework with students who are acquiring English as a second language. This study included the experiences of general education teachers and ESOL teachers and RtI specialists to understand the unique perceptions of each group. This researcher seeks to address gaps in literature regarding procedures and practices teachers use and their perception of the effectiveness of these practices with ELs in relation to the RtI framework.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine perceptions of the effectiveness of the Response to Intervention (RtI) framework when implemented with English learners. Data from the study will be utilized to determine what processes are used, how these processes are implemented and to examine perceptions of effectiveness of the framework held by general education teachers, ESOL teachers and RtI Intervention specialists at these schools. The study investigated how teachers determine what data to collect and how the data are used to inform the progress of students from one tier to the next or previous. Secondarily, the study attempted to determine the degree to which the three groups of teachers collaborate with each other or other members of the community to increase the likelihood of academic success of ELs. The goal for this research is to identify common themes of teacher knowledge, perception, and concerns through personal and professional experiences in using the RtI decision making framework with ELs. The data collected from this research can provide understanding for educators, researchers and stakeholders about processes used to inform decisions surrounding students of linguistically diverse backgrounds. Additionally, the study can provide knowledge upon which schools can

build a protocol to ensure that linguistic, cultural, and contextual information is considered when evaluating students from dissimilar backgrounds for special education eligibility. Further, the results from this study will inform decisions regarding instructional strategies used with ELs and the design of ESOL programs

Significance of the Study

Seventy five percent of all high school dropouts reported difficulties learning to read (in any language) (Joshi et al., 2009). Ninety percent of all welfare recipients failed to learn to read (in any language) on grade level by third grade (TnDOE, 2016). Research concludes that interventions implemented with fidelity improve the academic achievement of ELs (citation needed). There are gaps, however, in the literature regarding the use of RtI by classroom teachers who collect data, which is integral to the intervention/ monitoring process (Klingner & Orosco, 2010). Dimino and Gersten (2006, p. 105) contended, "Therefore, it is necessary to understand, reliably describe and analyze how teachers who receive training actually implement the various interventions." The purpose of study must change from evaluating specific interventions to examining the process as it occurs at the school and classroom levels.

As student demographics continue to become more diverse, schools must address teachers' concerns that they feel they "do not have the knowledge and skills to appropriately instruct ELs" (Vaughn et al., 2009, para. 5). Teachers must be prepared to do more than deliver curriculum; they must be prepared to make informed decisions about every students' academic needs.

The current study explored the perception of effectiveness of RtI with a specific subgroup, and will contribute to the research regarding instruction, assessment and intervention for ELs. Ultimately, the study will expound upon literature informing the instructional and

intervention practices used with ELs as it examines teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of the RtI program with students from linguistically diverse backgrounds.

One of the criteria for an effective RtI program is to ensure it is implemented with fidelity. Successful implementation of RtI can provide targeted but flexible prevention and interventions in the least restrictive environment. Hawkins et al. (2008) examined implementation effectiveness and stakeholders' perceptions and concluded that successful implementation of the RtI framework within a school setting is dependent upon perceptions of educators in the school environment. Hawkins et al. (2008) determined collective decision making and a sense of alliance "undergird positive perceptions, which are necessary to ensure the collaboration of all practitioners in the RtI process" (p. 138). Hollenbeck (as cited in Curl, 2009) cautioned researchers not to overlook the importance of collaboration by practitioners in the RtI process. Curl (2009) suggested the needs of more students can be met through collaborative efforts of every educator within the school. Burns, Appleton and Stehouwer (2005) and VanDerHeyden, Witt and Gilbertson (2006) concluded RtI requires cohesive teams of educators within a school environment to make incremental data based decisions regarding students' academic progress.

The findings of this research will allow educators to make informed instructional decisions surrounding EL interventions and special education referrals. Presently, teachers refer ELs to special education "because it is a familiar way of getting help for students who are having difficulty in school" (Damico et al., 2007, p. 1). Providing teachers with effective alternatives, such as pre-referral interventions that ensure research based differentiated instruction to all students will result in a decrease in the disproportionate representation of ELs in special education programs. At the same time, language acquisition support will be provided to ELs

correctly identified as learning disabled, thus affording every student comparable career and post-secondary opportunities.

Research Questions

1. How do teachers perceive the RtI framework?
2. What are teacher perceptions of how RtI impacts the general education classroom?
3. What instructional practices do teachers perceive as effective for ELs?
4. How effective do teachers perceive RtI to be in advancing ELs' learning of academic content?

Definition of Terms

The terms regarding English learners and Response to Intervention are defined as:

Accommodations. Changes made to instruction or assessment that do not change the expectations for performance or change the construct that is being measured (RTI Action Network, nda).

Curriculum-based assessment (CBA). A measurement that uses direct observation and recording of a student's performance in the local curriculum as a basis for gathering information to make instructional decisions (RTI Action Network, ndb).

English as a Second or Other Language (ESOL) classes *used interchangeably with* ***English as a Second Language (ESL).*** Refers to programs of classes that target students identified as ELs (Damico et al., 2007).

English learners (ELs) used interchangeably with ***English Language Learners (ELLs).*** Students who are learning English but already speak (read, write and understand) another language (LaCelle-Peterson & Rivera, 1994).

Learning disability (LD). A heterogeneous group of disorders manifested by significant difficulties in the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, or mathematical abilities (National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities, 1990)

Limited English proficiency (LEP). Describes the proficiency of a student whose understanding of English limits the student's meaningful access to programs and services (U.S. Department of Education, 2005)

Response to Intervention (RtI) referred to as ***Response to Instruction and Intervention (RtI^2)*** in Tennessee. A framework of academic and behavioral interventions designed to provide early, targeted support to students not performing on grade level; Research-based interventions are implemented and frequent progress monitoring is conducted to assess student response and progress (Tennessee Department of Education, 2013)

Second language acquisition (SLA). A term that refers to the process of learning a language after learning a first language as a young child (Saville-Troike, 2006, p. 2).

Delimitations and Limitations

Delimitations

This study was limited to 10 participant teachers at the elementary level in a single county in East Tennessee. The criterion for purposeful selection for participation was teacher certification in the state of Tennessee in the areas of elementary education or English as a Second Language or to be actively functioning as Response to Intervention Specialist in one of the participating schools. It is noted that 98.3% of the students classified as English Learners at the schools participating in the study are Latino/Latina, speaking Spanish as a native language and

all of the schools participating are Title I school-wide program schools. The research focused on educators and the information they collect to decide on movement amongst tiers of intervention.

Limitations

It is also important to note the limitations that may reduce the generalizability of the findings in interpreting this research. One such limitation of this study was the small number of participants in this study. The study is further limited by the assumption that all participants responded truthfully to interview questions. Additionally, this study was conducted over a single semester and generalizability is dependent upon the conditions that existed at the participant schools during this time.

Further, the researcher's experience: teacher and school administrator at schools with significant EL populations, Coordinator of Federal Programs and Grants, current school administrator overseeing RtI implementation might also serve as a limitation resulting from personal biases.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This literature review is an examination of current research regarding the effectiveness of the Response to Intervention framework with English Learners (ELs). The progression of the education system in the United States beginning with the establishment of a common language during the late 1700s is discussed in the first section. Children had vastly different educational experiences depending on their socioeconomic and linguistical/cultural background. Once education was made compulsory, these disparities became more marked. The Civil Right Movement during the 1960s moved attention to the inequities and subsequent legislation during the 1970s confronted systemic discriminatory practices. This section includes the discussion of policies and legislation from a historical perspective and their impact on education.

Section Two provides an analysis of special education laws beginning with the 1975 development of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) (P.L. 94-142). This legislative action was renamed in 1990 as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and again in 2004 as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA). This section includes an analysis of the application of these Acts to students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and examines how the Acts have resulted in disproportionate identification of English Learners in the special education eligibility categories of learning disabled and specific learning disabled.

Section Two is followed by a discussion of the RtI framework. Recommendations made in IDEIA 2004 to use evidence-based measures to evaluate the needs of struggling learners are outlined in Section Three, which includes an analysis of the existing research surrounding the RtI framework as well as a discussion of the potential obstacles and benefits of the framework as it is implemented with English Learners.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of the current study was developed through the lens of the sociocultural paradigm which proposed that cognition occurs as a result of "reciprocal activity between an individual and the social context that is mediated by cultural knowledge, tools, symbols, and artifacts" (Vygotsky, 1978). Cultural norms and observances entwined with social relationships and daily life activities form the basis of cognitive activity (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003). As students interact with their environment and are exposed to and learn from others in the environment, the seemingly ordinary experiences they negotiate foster cognitive development (Orosco & Klingner, 2010). This process of scaffolding information upon prior knowledge through meaningful and challenging activities fosters learners' zones of proximal development (Tharp, Estrada, Dalton, & Yamauchi, 2000). Children use culturally constructed meaning to nurture and facilitate their mental functioning (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000).

Klingner and Edwards (2006) suggested that RtI models must consider the sociocultural interaction that enables contextualization of instruction, intervention and assessment between children's prior knowledge and developing literacy concepts. The relevance of activities and materials in a classroom is central to students' knowledge and skills acquisition. "Instruction and assessment must involve the weaving of new-schooled concepts with those of everyday life; instruction cannot be meaningful without incorporating the student's system of meaning and understandings" (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). Teachers support students to develop new skills and knowledge by providing a bridge between students' potential and their cultural knowledge to ensure students develop the knowledge/skills needed to achieve mastery (Gonzalez et al., 2005). According to Palinscar and Brown (1984) student comprehension is developed

through discussion and problem solving opportunities provided as background to instructional activities.

Prior to the passage of legislation mandating the use of linguistically unbiased testing instruments, education agencies relied on the results of IQ tests which did not account for contextual and environmental factors when assessing English learners (Klingner & Harry, 2006). These instruments were administered in English to ELs suspected of being learning disabled and provided invalid results because of their limited English proficiency (Klingner & Harry, 2006). Verbal and performance IQ scores of ELs who demonstrate proficiency in English are often discrepant and several studies concluded they provide inaccurate information regarding learning abilities of ELs because they do not allow for the consideration of contextual factors (Figueroa & Newsome, 2006; Klingner & Harry, 2006).

Sociocultural theory is grounded in the fundamental belief that all learners must be provided with high-quality instruction that not only incorporates, but is centered on learners' cultural and linguistic backgrounds and experiences. Teachers must develop the instructional context that facilitates learning and development through pre-service and ongoing in-service training to ensure English learners are assessed equitably and allowed to participate in a meaningful way in instruction and intervention (Gutierrez, Morales, & Martinez, 2009).

The Power of Perceptions

Several organizations participated in a study to ascertain what factors were most important to the successful implementation of RtI (CASE, 2006; NASDSE, 2006, Title I Directors, 2007). The study concluded that positive perceptions held by teacher of the potential effectiveness of the framework is the biggest predictor of successful implementation. These perceptions are predicated upon teachers feelings of self-efficacy which often result from the

quality of teacher training they received prior to and throughout implementation. The literature supports the provision of quality professional development as a significant determinant of the effectiveness of RtI. (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Gessler-Werts, Lambert, & Carpenter, 2009; Glocker, 2003; Hollenbeck, 2007). NASDSE and CASE (2006) emphasized the importance of the presence of three elements in any teacher training. These include measurable and non-measurable, affective factors: knowledge, skill, beliefs and attitudes. Reschly et al. (2003) asserted the degree to which RtI is effectively implemented is largely dependent on the foundation provided to teachers during the early stages of the process. Tubpun (2012) found that that years of teaching experience and educational level did not influence teachers' perceptions of their skills. However, hours of RtI training was a significant factor in influencing teachers' perceptions of their RtI skills.

Speece and Molloy (2003) studied RtI implementation across many agencies and schools and determined the effectiveness of the interventions is significantly impacted by administrators' and teachers' implementation of the interventions and concluded that stakeholder buy-in affects the fidelity of the implementation. This in turn affects the learning environment of the students.

Klingner and Harry (2006) sought to understand why and the processes by which ELs were being referred for special education eligibility. The study included data from nine schools in a single state in the southern United States. Each school used different models of language support for English learners. Interviews were the primary data source, and researchers concluded teachers were not clear as to when to refer ELs for evaluation for special education eligibility or whether/how to conduct the assessment in English. Further, as stated previously, teachers believe they lack preparation to instruct linguistically diverse students and these feelings of inadequacy are exacerbated when these students struggle academically (Klingner & Harry,

2006). Klingner and Harry found educators were not confident in their ability to distinguish between language acquisition and learning disability.

According to Gerber (2003), "The few RtI studies that exist report little about variations in teachers' thoughts and behaviors during administration of planned interventions" (p. 5). Much of the early RtI research focused on evaluating the technical aspects of implementation (Griffiths, Parson, Burns, VanDerHeyden, & Tilly, 2007; Rinaldi et al., 2011; O'Connor & Freeman, 2012). Recently studies, however, have been conducted to gain insight into educator perceptions of the model (Hoover, Baca, Wexler-Love, and Saenz, 2008; Pyle, 2011; Rinaldi et al., 2011). Many of these studies examine whether teachers perceive they have the skills, training, and resources necessary to implement and carryout the RtI process.

Mellard and Johnson (2004) contended,

> Even with a solid research base, if teachers believe an approach will not be effective, or if it is inconsistent with their teaching style, they will not implement it well. RtI represents a paradigm shift for many teachers. The focus on ongoing progress monitoring, the increased reliance on the general education teacher to provide support for students at risk, and the routine collection and analysis of data to support instructional decision making are all very different from what many teachers may have been trained to do. As a result, staffs will need to continue to discuss their perceptions of RtI and to be encouraged to openly communicate if specific components present significant challenges to their teaching approaches or philosophy. These discussions can help find workable solutions to implementation. (p.166)

To perceive the framework as effective, teachers must believe they possess the skills needed to implement RtI. Hawkins et al. (2008) examined implementation efficacy and stakeholders' perceptions and concluded that successful implementation of the RtI framework within a school setting is dependent upon perceptions of educators in the school environment. Moreover, Bartle (2009) found some teachers do not feel fully prepared to handle the varied needs of students through the RtI framework.

Educators often view success with learners as being conditioned upon being able to motivate and instruct students in a manner that results in improved student performance and learning (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk-Hoy & Hoy (1998) as cited in Nunn and Jantz, 2009). As students demonstrate success teacher self-efficacy increases which positively impacts teacher perceptions of an initiative. "This is a confirmatory process validating the influence of the teacher to effect positive outcomes as described by Bandura (1997) (as cited in Nunn and Jantz, 2009).

Nunn and Jantz (2009) gathered data from 429 K-12 teachers, administrators, and support professionals. All participants received training on the implementation of the RtI model throughout the first year. Some participants were assigned to cohorts and received additional training on instructional best practices. These five-day training sessions occurred in six week intervals every six months over the ensuing four-year period. Additionally, these participants were asked to meet in school based collaborative teams to facilitate the transfer of newly acquired knowledge to practice. These participants reported higher levels of self-efficacy and generally were more optimistic about the potential benefit of the framework. The authors concluded a significant association exists between teacher self-efficacy and perceptions of effectiveness of the framework upon student learning. Authors of the study recommended that action should be taken during implementation to address teacher concerns and feelings of inefficacy.

Rogers (2010) also found that teachers may report inadequacy and lack of confidence when asked about their skills and knowledge of the model. Rogers (2010) reported many teachers lack confidence in their RtI competence and cite lack of support and training as reasons for these feelings of inadequacy. Zelenka (2010) found teachers do not follow framework

guidelines with fidelity and attribute lapses to schedule challenges, shortage of personnel to provide interventions, and their own inefficacy in making research-based instruction/ interventions viable in the classroom.

Rinaldi et al. (2011) conducted a three-year study of RtI implementation in an urban elementary school with a high percentage of English language learners. Twenty-six teachers in the school were selected to participate in the study. Throughout the three-year period, participants engaged in weekly professional development sessions. Additionally, three annual ninety-minute professional development sessions were provided by an RtI specialist-researcher from the university partnering with the school. During these sessions, participants received an overview of the components of the RtI model and implementation as well as comprehensive training on collaborative planning and the use of scientifically-based instructional reading strategies. Additionally, participants were trained in data analysis, curriculum-based assessments, instruction, and problem-solving to address inadequate response to intervention. Researchers interviewed teacher participants at intervals during the three-year period.

According to Rinaldi et al. (2011), teachers perceived collaboration among all teachers in the school increased contributing to improved instruction in each tier and a collective understanding of shared responsibility for student learning. Rinaldi et al. noted that teachers viewed implementation as a top down directive in the initial year of implementation. However, teachers began to describe themselves as change agents in the second year. Anecdotes gathered during the third year of the study indicate that participants, "… willingly took on challenges and assumed responsibility for the model's implementation" (p. 47). Teachers indicated RtI enhanced core instruction throughout the school, improved their understanding of the special education referral process, and increased the attention to progress monitoring. Teacher

participants were willing to engage in collaborative planning and reported increased confidence in their ability to report academic progress and willingness to problem solve instructional delivery methods for different students. Further, Rinaldi et al. (2011) reported participants also felt they were using data more effectively to plan differentiated core and intervention instruction during the second year of the study. Participants stated that sharing responsibility for student learning resulted in a deeper understanding of student growth and challenges. Teacher participants specifically related this deeper understanding to English learners (Rinaldi et al., 2011).

During the third year of the study, participants described themselves as highly effective in reporting student academic growth and as having an improved understanding of the purpose of RtI between the first and third year of implementation. Rinaldi et al. (2011) noted the referral rate for special education services the year prior to implementation was 10%. This rate dropped to 2.3% in the third year of implementation. Participants believed this resulted from adequate attention being given to monitoring student progress and increased capacity to implement interventions. During the first year of implementation, teacher participants expressed concern about the lack of shared planning time amongst teachers, paraprofessionals, and interns administering interventions. However, during year three, collaboration was perceived to be central to the school's culture. Rinaldi et al. reported although participants related encouraging effects during the third year of the study, some participants expressed concern that the success would not be sustainable in the absence of the leadership of the sitting principal. Further, participants considered staff turnover a threat to fidelity of implementation and noted that implementation had caused a considerable number of staff to leave. Notably, participants voiced concern over the added challenges to effective implementation that would result if more staff

were required to teach the increasing population of English learners in sheltered English classrooms.

Rinaldi et al. (2011) concluded that implementation positively impacted the school's culture and a greater sense of empowerment and self-efficacy resulted in positive perceptions of the framework. The researchers further concluded the provision of professional development, supportive administration, and collaborative culture facilitated successful implementation and positive perceptions by stakeholders.

Hernandez (2012) examined teacher perceptions of the RtI framework. Thirty-one elementary level general education teachers reported being aware of the purpose of RtI and that they were generally familiar with the procedures used during the process. Several participants felt the process was too time consuming. Some expressed concerns they did not have adequate knowledge about the process nor how to execute it. Hernandez concluded that participants did not perceive the model as effective, but that additional training and support could ameliorate negative views.

Meester (2012) conducted a quantitative study of five elementary teachers to ascertain their perceptions of the RtI framework and found teachers were favorable of RtI, believing it would positively impact student achievement. The teachers reported they could implement interventions and they understood the premise of RtI. Participants demonstrated confusion about terms used in RtI, including: Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3. They expressed that implementation of RtI was challenging.

Kozleski and Huber (2010) stated that RtI is a theoretical school reform and successful implementation requires awareness of and sensitivity to the context. Education leaders must address the needs and demands of the local contexts. In schools, these contexts are influenced by

educator expectations, professional development, access to resources, administrative support and professional relationships. This context affects how educators perceive RtI (Kozleski & Huber, 2010). According to O'Connor and Freeman (2012), the culture and beliefs existing within a school are often overlooked as factors affecting perceptions of the effectiveness of RtI. Kozelski and Huber (2010) described challenges to this context as: lack of clarify about rationale for the framework; lack of knowledge, preparation, and ongoing support; lack of knowledge about how English learners fit within the framework, and lack of knowledge of what counts as evidence-based practices or what constitutes student responsiveness to intervention (as cited in Klingner, Artiles, Baca, & Hoover, 2007, pp. 259-260)

Kozleski and Huber (2010) emphasized the importance of promoting the collective understanding that RtI is not a function of special education or a necessary step preceding referral for evaluation. Kozleski and Huber contended that school principals play a vital role in fostering positive perceptions of effectiveness by promoting the value of RtI as a "core educational practice" (p. 262). Promoting the shared belief that the framework lies within the purview of the general education teacher to offer early support and intervention within the general classroom has a positive impact upon perceptions held by teachers. Additional facilitative conditions include supporting ongoing professional learning, providing access to resources, addressing educator concerns, scheduling adequate time, and interpreting and using student and schoolwide data to guide instructional decisions.

Pyle (2011) explored issues related to implementation of RtI assessment practices used to identify and support Tier 2 students within four pilot schools in Ontario, Canada. Pyle found one significant challenge to implementation was teachers' belief the there was a lack of cohesion between components of the framework and existing instructional practices. Educators perceived

this lack of cohesion because instructional interventions paralleling assessment results were not implemented at the same time RtI assessments were introduced within the pilot schools. Educators also expressed frustration with the time it took to administer the assessments. Participants expressed negative feelings about RtI assessments because administration took time away from instruction. Classroom teachers and special educators across the district expressed the belief it would not be feasible to conduct interventions in the general classroom. However, special educators did not feel they had the time or influence to provide support for students identified through the RtI process because of the substantial number of students already being served in the special education program. Pyle (2011) concluded the disjointed implementation and corresponding lack of coherence between RtI and existing assessment and instructional practices were obstacles to successful implementation and adversely influenced teacher perceptions of the potential effectiveness of the framework.

Hoover and Love (2011) conducted a case study of obstacles facing teacher leaders when implementing RtI within their respective suburban elementary schools. Participants were required to identify implementation issues and develop strategies to meet the needs of students identified for support within the school. General school staff received two days of professional development setting forth the strictures and elements of RtI. Although follow-up support was not provided to general school staff, participants in the study received further training in tiered instruction, research-based interventions, data-based decision making, and the use of the framework to inform decisions regarding special education eligibility. The researchers identified six factors common to all participant schools that were related to educator perception and knowledge of RtI. Hoover and Love determined it was important for educators to understand the purpose of RtI as being to identify and address instructional deficits rather than deficits within

the student. The researchers stated that within student deficits are commonly the focus of pre-referral and discrepancy-based models of determining student eligibility (Hoover & Love, 2011). Determining the appropriate level of intervention for a student was also a common misunderstanding amongst teacher leaders participating in the study. The researchers concluded it is essential that every member of the team understand assessment and decision-making practices outlined in RtI implementation protocol. The researchers emphasized the importance of supporting teachers' understanding of how students are identified, served, and monitored within the tiers before considering special education consideration referral. The researchers further determined it was necessary to develop educators' shared understanding of the importance of fidelity in implementation and the use of research-based interventions.

Hoover and Love (2011) noted more than 50% of the English learner population enrolled in participating schools had been referred for Tier 2 intervention. Distinguishing between language differences and learning disabilities in diverse learners was identified as an issue among teacher leader participants and their school teams. Hoover and Love (2011) concluded that it is essential to improve educators' use of assessment and anecdotal data to measure rate of progress in addition to benchmark score when considering the distinction between learners with language and/or cultural differences and those who may have a learning disability.

In 2012, White, Polly, and Audette conducted a case study to examine the impact state-level professional development had upon the capacity of one school to implement RtI. The participant school was selected to pilot RtI implementation for the respective district. Ten members of the RtI school leadership team, a lead teacher, and four district administrators were interviewed to discover their perceptions of the framework. Contextual factors that impact these perceptions were also discussed.

Seven of the 15 educators participated in extensive professional development training over multiple days. This training was provided by the state department of education. Remaining participants attended an abbreviated training session offered by district and school personnel. White et al. (2012) identified the presence of contextual factors supportive of successful implementation. Specifically, the researchers noted participants perceived the principal's support of the model as very strong. Several teacher participants stated they trusted their principal and felt safe to voice concern and questions with school leadership. Some teachers reported they appreciated the principal was willing to proceed slowly to ensure that the initiative was done "completely and with excellence" (p. 85), while simultaneously applying pressure to persevere when they began to feel overwhelmed.

Fixsen et al. (2005) (as cited in White et al. (2012) emphasized the importance of obtaining teacher buy-in and providing ample support to increase the likelihood of successful implementation of RtI. Teachers participants in the White et al. (2012) study shared their belief the plans were working for students. As teachers observed student success, their motivation to buy-in to the new model increased and perceptions of the potential benefit of the framework improved. Some participants also expressed positive perceptions of specific components of the model.

One participant stated the framework was a more comprehensive way to address student learning difficulties. White et al. (2012) reported participants expressed a preference for the RtI model and expressed feelings of frustration with old models of providing intervention services.

Several contextual issues also emerged from the study. Some participants expressed efficacy concerns related to the complexity of interventions and lack of time to collaborate with fellow teachers. Some participants also expressed feeling overwhelmed and fatigued and that the

implementation was "too much too soon" (White et al., 2012, p. 87). Many expressed the desire to have been given time to learn the new assessment database system before starting implementation. White et al. concluded that because, "… some teachers did not at first understand the need for timely data collection and entry," (p. 87), delays in data entry adversely impacted discussions concerning student progress. The authors also reported that some of the student assessment data was already outdated by the time it was entered because of the intensive training schedule. White et al. (2012) concluded the findings documented evidence collaborative relationships between district and school personnel that facilitated cooperative planning and implementation. The researchers also determined that principal and team leadership and problem-solving were essential to the model's successful execution. As a general education initiative, effective school-level application of the RtI model depends on the collaborative effort of many different school and district educators. Teachers must perceive the model as effective to be willing to remain engaged in the challenging work required for ongoing successful execution.

Education in the United States

This country was founded by individuals from various countries speaking diverse languages. The historical and philosophical background of the education system in the United States has paralleled the nation's development and reflects the diversity of its residents. In the early years of the nation's school system, the quality of education a student received varied significantly depending upon the race, gender, cultural and language background, socioeconomic status and geography of students' family.

When education was legislated as compulsory in the early 1900s, the demographics represented in a typical classroom became increasingly diverse. According to Allington and Walmsley (2007), during the early 20th century, students in public schools whose learning rate

fell below that of their peers were referred to as slow learners. Researchers began to explore biological causes of learning disabilities and processing difficulties. The term slow learner evolved to "mildly handicapped," and these students were typically segregated from the general education population and categorized as economically or culturally disadvantaged. In 1954, the United States Supreme Court struck down this practice, declaring the separate but equal doctrine as a form of government sanctioned discrimination (Brown v. Bd. of Education, 1954). Brown significantly impacted education in that it recognized the disparity in opportunities and access to resources which resulted when students were separated based on gender, race, cognitive ability (Graham, 2009; Ovando et al., 2006). Research around learning disabilities and mental retardation expanded significantly during the 1960s, and while it had been held that mental retardation and learning disabilities were related conditions studies revealed considerable differences between the two disorders. In 1962, Kirk and Bateman (as cited in Kame'enui, 2007) published the first description of learning disability:

> A learning disability refers to a retardation, disorder, or processes of speech, language reading, writing, arithmetic, or other school subjects resulting from a psychological handicap caused by a possible cerebral dysfunction and/or emotional or behavioral disturbances. It is not the result of mental retardation, sensory deprivation, or cultural or instructional factors (p. 71).

In this definition of learning disability, Kirk and Bateman asserted learning disabilities could not be the result of cultural differences or instructional deficiencies (Kame'enui, 2007). Similar language was used in 1975, when Public Law 94-142, Education for all Handicapped Children Act was passed. The present day definition uses the same verbiage Kirk and Bateman used in their original definition.

The Civil Rights Movement in the following decade brought attention to the disparities existing between the enfranchised and the marginalized residents in the nation. Subsequently, in

the 1970s, significant legislation was enacted which recognized students in minority groups as being in need of additional academic support. The civil rights movement resulted in research, litigation and federal legislation that revealed educational opportunity gaps for students with disabilities as well as those from cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds. The legislators responsible for the passage of these laws required schools to establish programs to address these gaps and required teachers to receive specialized training to work with students who were economically disadvantaged (Graham, 2009).

The 1966 amendment to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was the first measure to stipulate additional support be provided for students with disabilities. ESEA established funding for states to improve educational programs for students with disabilities, which was expanded in 1970 by the Education of the Handicapped Act (EHA) (P.L. 91-230). However, the Act did not address specific use of federal funds for these purposes (NCD, 2000).

In 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education (NCEE) published the report entitled, "A Nation at Risk." The authors of this report suggested the educational system in the United States had abandoned the foundational purpose of public education and had failed to set and maintain high expectations for the education of children. The recommendations made in the report led to the development of national goals for education (Austin, 1995) which allowed the federal government to assert a role in education and address the learning needs of all children. The report recommended schools be held accountable to ensure that students acquire academic proficiency in reading, math, language, social studies, and science.

The National Reading Panel (NRP) was formed in 1997 following a Congressional mandate which called for a review of literature to establish which strategies were most effective in teaching children to read. Only experimental and quasi-experimental studies which met

rigorous standards were selected for this review (NRP, 2001). In 2001, the panel concluded that instruction which used a variety of techniques that advance phonics, phonemic awareness, vocabulary and comprehension, and fluency are effective to teach children to read. Further, the panel concluded that teachers must be provided with in depth and ongoing training in the use of specific strategies (as cited in National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHHD), 2000) to improve the educational performance of students with disabilities.

In response to the NRP report, the 2002 reauthorization of ESEA, referred to as No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), required states to implement more rigorous standards to facilitate the development of foundational academic skills, ensure high quality evidence based instruction and intervention techniques, and improve the performance of all students on the NAEP and annual statewide achievement tests.

The convergence of significant changes in federal law with the recommendations of the National Reading Panel (NRP, 2001) began a series of school reform movements. No Child Left Behind 2001 (NCLB) (P.L. 107-110) established new federal standards for teacher quality and accountability that had not been previously considered in IDEA 1997 (Wright & Wright, 2007). NCLB set standards for highly qualified teachers, emphasized the use of research based instructional materials and support, and required that states report performance data for students with disabilities and those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (Wright & Wright, 2007). The law required schools to identify students who demonstrated characteristics indicative of academic failure.

In 2011, NCLB was reauthorized and gave states flexibility to design comprehensive plans to increase learning outcomes for all students, reduce the achievement gaps of certain groups of students, and improve the quality of instruction in classrooms across the United States

(Mandinach & Jackson, 2012). This initiative, known as Race to the Top (RttT), provided funding for which states could apply. States were tasked to increase support for low performing schools and to address the unique needs of special education students, students with limited English proficiency, minority students, and economically disadvantaged students. This reauthorization afforded states and local educational agencies (LEAs) flexibility to design school improvement plans which addressed their own areas of need (ARRA, 2011).

Special Education Legislation

Controversy surrounding the identification of learning disabilities preceded its mention in the legislation. This debate centered on the identification of students, organic causes and treatment of learning disabilities. This section includes an overview of Special Education legislation and the origin of the special education eligibility of learning disabled in the United States and the impact on ELs. This overview includes a discussion of the discrepancy model, the weaknesses of the model and the early use of pre-referral intervention to address students' learning needs.

In 1962, Kirk and Bateman published their description of characteristics students with learning disabilities demonstrate. Subsequently, researchers sought a way to quantify learning disabilities. The IQ/achievement discrepancy model was developed and became the standard for identification for special education eligibility as learning disabled (Kame' ennui, 2007).

Education of All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA).

Public Law 94-142 was passed into law as the Education of All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) in 1977 in response to accusations of discriminatory treatment by public educational agencies against students with disabilities. The goal of EAHCA was to provide children with disabilities the same opportunities for education as students who did not have a disability (Wright & Wright, 2007). The act

established procedures for referring, evaluating, and placing students into special education programs and held state and local education agencies accountable for providing educational services for all handicapped children (Wright & Wright, 2007, p. 42). The focus of the Act was to provide a system of checks and balances to ensure equitable access and process of law for all students with disabilities (Wright & Wright, 2007).

Litigators of the lawsuit Dyrcia S. et al. v. B. O. E. city of New York et al. (1979) sought to enforce the rights of ELs with disabilities to free and appropriate education (FAPE). The New York court decision determined that ELs with disabilities had historically been denied FAPE as a result of inappropriate assessment and placement practices (Baca & de Valenzuela, 1998). Despite the action and reforms outlined in EAHCA for the identification and placement of students in special education programs, disproportionate representation of ELs in special education programs persisted (Fletcher & Navarrete, 2003). Rodriguez (1982) cited research indicating the continuing overrepresentation of EL students in special education programs, and Pacheco (1983) referred to studies evidencing the ongoing underrepresentation of ELs in special education programs.

Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA). On October 30, 1990, EAHCA was reauthorized as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (P.L. 101-476). IDEA strengthened protections to students with disabilities and provided additional guidance regarding the instruction of students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment (LRE). IDEA stipulated the use of culturally and linguistically unbiased evaluation of ELs (Baca & de Valenzuela, 1998). The two most basic rights ensured by the IDEA is that every disabled student is entitled to a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment. The LRE mandate requires that, to the greatest extent possible, every student be educated with

their nondisabled peers, while still providing FAPE. The stipulation is founded upon U. S. Congressional conclusion that research and experience had proven that students with disabilities were more successful academically, socially and emotionally, when educators held high expectations for them and when students were provided access to the general education curriculum to the greatest degree possible (Ovando et al., 2006).

Authors of IDEA stated that a child can only be eligible as learning disabled when he has been taught in a language the student understands for a sufficient amount of time. Referring ELs for special education evaluation would not be appropriate if the students had not been provided with ample and appropriate learning opportunities (Bernhard et al., 2006; Hehir, 2002). ELs may experience challenges in acquiring English concurrent with academic skills. These challenges may be further exacerbated by contextual factors such as the sociocultural climate within the classroom and school (Bernhard et al., 2006). With the passage of IDEA 1990, legislators brought increased attention to the disproportionality of minority student representation in special education programs, subsequent research substantiated that students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds continued to be inappropriately found eligible for special education services (Ovando et al., 2006). During the early 1990s, the practice of using IQ tests to determine eligibility was questioned. Several studies suggested IQ tests were invalid with EL students and resulted in disproportionate identification of ELs as learning disabled (Artiles & Trent, 1994; Carrasquillo, 1990; Jitendra & Rohena-Diaz, 1996; Robertson et al., 1994).

Amendments to IDEA. The Individuals with Disabilities Act was amended by Congress in June, 1997 (IDEA 1997) (P.L. 105-17). The amendments outlined comprehensive guidelines for assessing ELs, including the use of multiple measures to determine eligibility. IDEA 1997 required the use of a variety of assessment tools and strategies to gather information about the

child that may assist in determining whether the child has a disability [34 C.F.R. §300.532 (b)]. This amendment included procedural safeguards for non-English speaking parents by detailing acceptable practices for communicating with non-English speaking parents. According to 34 C.F.R. §300.503(c)(1)(ii), IDEA 1997 required all forms of communication were to be provided in the parents' native language. This provision included parents who were not literate in any language.

Questions concerning discriminatory identification/eligibility practices were addressed in 34 C.F.R. §300.304(c)(1)(i-ii) of IDEA 1997, which required all evaluations and assessments of a child be conducted in the child's native language, unless it was explicitly not possible to do so. IDEA 1997 also addressed bias in defining specific learning disability as not including learning problems that are the result of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage [34 C.F.R. §300.7 (b)(10)(ii)].

Through the authorization of IDEA 1997, legislators mandated states collect demographic data of students in special education programs. States were to analyze the representation of minority students in specific special education categories and address the issue of disproportionate identification of ELs (OSEP, 1997). This analysis provided evidence of both overrepresentation and underrepresentation of ELs in special education programs (OSEP, 2001).

According to Wright and Wright (2007), although IDEA 1997 heightened awareness of minority placement practices and expanded accountability measures not previously addressed, inappropriate practices continued to be used to determine the eligibility of ELs as learning disabled. Much of the public policy debate and related literature during this time centered on disproportionate representation of minority students in special education programs. This focus continued until IDEA was reauthorized in 2004 (Wright & Wright, 2007).

On October 2, 2001, the President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education (PCESE) was created and charged with studying issues related to federal, state, and local special education programs in order to improve the educational performance of students with disabilities. The research of Heller et al. (1982), along with 'A Nation at Risk' and 'Goals 2000' were the bases for the PCESE Report (2002) which highlighted concerns educators expressed regarding the over identification of students as eligible for special education services (PCESE, 2002).

During the commission's public hearing parents and educators demanded procedures for determining eligibility for entrance into and exit from special education be changed (Flynn, 2002). The validity of IQ tests was questioned, and a system of interventions within the context of general education was outlined. Student response to these differentiated and individualized research based interventions was monitored and considered as a measure in determining students eligibility for special education programs (PCESE, 2002).

The Commission's report, entitled: *A New Era: Revitalizing Special Education for Children and Their Families,* outlined nine major findings and three recommendations to improve special education program in U. S. public schools (PCESE, 2002). One recommendation was that special education program leaders, "embrace a model of prevention not a model of failure" (PCESE, p. 9). According to the Commission, "The current model guiding special education focuses on waiting for a child to fail, not on early intervention to prevent failure. Reforms must move the system toward early identification and swift intervention, using scientifically based instruction and teaching methods" (p. 9). In their report, the Commission contended this would require changes in the nation's elementary and secondary schools as well as reforms in teacher preparation, recruitment, and support (PCESE).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA 2004). In 2004, IDEA was reauthorized and renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Action (IDEIA 2004) (P.L. 108-446). Through the passage of the updated IDEIA, legislators sought to improve the quality of education for all students. An anticipated outcome of this law was to reduce the number of students receiving special education services, at the same time providing services to those who needed them, in the least restrictive environment possible. According to Wright and Wright (2007), while both the original law and the 2004 reauthorization defined special education as instruction designed to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability, the reauthorization in 2004 transformed special education across the country. This reauthorization reinforced federal mandates for teacher quality and accountability included in the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) (P. L. 107-110) in 2001. It expanded upon stipulations related to early intervention, the use of research-based interventions, and state reporting requirements (Wright & Wright, 2007). Consistent with Kirk and Bateman's 1962 definition, specific learning disability was defined in Section 602 of the IDEIA 2004 as not including a learning problem that is primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, or mental retardation, of emotion disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage (as cited in Kame'enui, 2007, p. 71).

With the reauthorization of IDEA, state and local education leaders were allowed discretion to monitor student response to scientific, research-based intervention over time in determining whether a child had a learning disability.

Throughout preceding decades, educators, parents and policy makers expressed concern regarding the identification procedures used to identify students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (Coutinho & Oswald, 2000). IDEIA 2004 discussed the increase of limited

and non-English speaking students in U. S. schools and recognized the "documented apparent discrepancies in the levels of referral and placement of limited English proficient children in special education" [20 U.S.C. §1400(b)(1)].

According to Kushner (2008), IDEIA 2004 addressed concerns the discrepancy model had created disproportional representation of ELs in special education programs in U.S. schools. States were required to gather and analyze demographic data of students with disabilities and examine the number and percentage of students with disabilities in each limited English proficiency level [P.L. 108-446 §618(a) (1) (A)]. Included in Title 34, the Code of Federal Regulation, states were charged with monitoring data to identify disproportionate representation of racial and ethnic groups in special education and related services, to the extent the representation is the result of inappropriate identification (OSEP, 2007).

Authors of IDEIA 2004 maintained many of the provisions of IDEA 1997 but added specifications regarding the evaluation of ELs suspected of having learning disability. In addition to stipulations that state education leaders collect and examine data for ELs identified as having special needs, the legislators outlined mandates regarding engaging and communicating with non-English speaking parents and the use of culturally neutral tests and materials (Kushner, 2008). Through this reauthorization legislators upheld the requirements that parents be notified prior to their students being evaluated as well as the provision that communication must be in the parents' native language, unless that is not possible [34 C.F.R. §300.503(c) (1) (ii)]. The requirement that any test or evaluation materials used are not to be culturally or linguistically discriminatory was also upheld [34 C.F.R. §300.304(c) (1)(i)].

Lawmakers responsible for the passage of IDEIA 2004 required that evaluation of ELs must not use any single measure as the sole criterion for determining whether a has a disability

[20 U.S.C. §14114(2) (b)]. The Act provided for the use of multiple measures including culturally neutral criteria in determining student eligibility for special education services. Measures for ascertaining academic need and determining eligibility must include information from a variety of sources including aptitude and achievement tests, parental input, and teacher recommendations, as well as information about the child's physical condition, social or cultural background, and adaptive behavior (IDEIA, 2004). Teachers should select assessment materials that measure the academic need of ELs, not the level of cultural or linguistic proficiency of the student (IDEIA, 2004). As stated in 20 U.S.C. §1414(3) (A) (i-ii), "Evaluation materials should not be racially or culturally discriminatory and should be administered in the language most likely to produce accurate results, to the extent that it is feasible".

With the 2004 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act state education leaders were allowed to use pre-referral instructional processes based on "the child's response to scientific, research based interventions" as an alternative to the IQ-Discrepancy Model in the diagnosis of specific learning disabilities. The discrepancy model can be utilized to identify a child demonstrating at least one and a half grade discrepancy between their actual performance and their expected performance (based on IQ) as falling into the learning disabled range (Hoover, Baca, Wexler & Saenz, 2008). As an alternative to the discrepancy model, authors of §300.307 (a) (1-3) afforded state education leaders leeway to establish criteria for identification of students with specific learning disability that:

(1) Does not require the use of a severe discrepancy between intellectual ability and academic achievement as evidence of a specific learning disability;

(2) Considers students' response to scientific, research based intervention;

(3) Includes the use of alternative scientific measures for determining whether a student has a specific learning disability (IDEIA, 2004) (34 CFR §300.307).

Further, with the passage of §300.308 of IDEIA, legislators established that specific learning disability would be determined by a "team of qualified professionals" who substantiate the student has not responded to intervention or exhibits academic patterns that indicate a learning disability which is not the result of cultural, environmental, economic factors or limited English proficiency. Federal action included response to intervention; however, authority was left to leaders of individual state education agencies to set criteria for identifying students with specific learning disability (Walker & Daves, 2010). This Act was written to allow states to use various intervention and eligibility procedures, and also to choose which method of assessment to use to determine each student's unique area of deficiency.

Background of Response to Intervention

The IDEIA model of identification allowed LEAs to use a discrepancy model, but also encouraged the use of a response to intervention model to identify students believed to have a learning disability. The law stipulated only research based intervention methods could be used and further required these interventions address the specific weaknesses identified through student assessment.

A review of the literature offers conflicting origins of the RtI framework. It is generally held that it originated in the early 1970s with Stanley Deno's instructional program modification model. This model emphasized the use of data to inform instructional decisions to address students' academic progress (Batsche et al., 2005). However, Madeline Will's manuscript presented to the United States Department of Education (1986) is recognized as the document setting forth the foundation for RtI. In this report, Will advocated for a change in the model used

to deliver services to students identified as requiring special education. The changes suggested include the use of new instructional approaches, increased instructional time in general education classrooms and improved training and support for teachers (Will, 1986).

Ardoin et al. (2005) contended that RtI was conceived in the 1982 when Heller, Holtzman, and Messicks criticized the discrepancy model. This 1982 report was prepared for the National Research council to study the over-representation of minorities in special education. (Heller et al., 1982). This study concentrated on the quality of instruction and existing assessment and referral practices for students suspected of having learning disabilities (Porter, 2008). Heller et al. (1982) summarized the recommendations of this report and made additional recommendations to ensure high quality research based instruction in general education classrooms, special education programming to ensure improved student outcomes, and appraisal of the special education referral process. The recommendations of Heller et al. supported assertions the discrepancy model was unreliable because it does not significantly improve the quality of classroom instruction (Hintze, 2008).

IQ/Achievement Discrepancy Model

Prior to the passage of IDEIA, schools identified students as having learning disabilities by measuring the difference between their IQ and their achievement scores. This discrepancy model is an analysis of the differences between a student's potential achievement (measured as IQ) and their actual achievement. When EAHCA established procedures for assessing and serving students believed to have a learning disability, the federal government set forth a formula by which to determine what constituted a severe discrepancy. Attempts to standardize the discrepancy were rebuffed, and states were allowed leeway to determine the degree of difference required for eligibility as learning disabled. The discrepancy model became accepted practice in

evaluating and determining eligibility of students with academic difficulties believed to need special education services. This acceptance could be attributed to the desire for quantifiable criteria to determine eligibility and the lack of clarity as to what was meant by the term, 'learning disability.' Special education professionals questioned the validity of the discrepancy model, however, it remained the principal measure for determining learning disability for more than three decades (Algozzine, Ysseldyke & Shinn, 1982; Torgensen, 1989; Vellutino, Scanlon & Lyon, 2000; Vellutino, Scanlon, Zhang & Schatschneider, 2008). The enactment of IDEIA 2004 spurred long awaited reforms to Special Education Law and resulted in evidence based regulations requiring more effective ways to determine why a student is struggling academically.

Of the reasons cited for moving away from the discrepancy model of identification, three are particularly significant when considering the eligibility for special education services of ELs. According to Reschly and Hosp (2003), the IQ/discrepancy model provides no defined pathway for intervention, assessment and measurement to increase a student's performance. Shinn, Ysseldyke, Deno, and Tindal's (1986) curriculum based measures (CBM) to identify LDs are more closely aligned with authentic performance expectations and therefore provide a more informed view of services and supports students with learning disability need.

Reschly and Hosp (2003) added that many of the instruments used to measure a student's IQ and actual achievement cannot be proven to be culturally and linguistically unbiased. The researchers cited two court cases in which courts ruled against the use of such instruments. In these cases, students were not assessed in their native language (*Diana v. California State Bd. Of Education* [1970/1973]) or were assessed using instruments that were normed based on the performance of groups which did not include individuals from similar cultural backgrounds (*Larry P. v. Riles* [1082/1986]). In both cases, these students were found to have disabilities.

Finally, as mentioned previously, the model "waits for students to fail." Rather than taking steps at the earliest signs of academic struggle, the discrepancy model waits to intervene until the gap between a student's IQ (achievement potential) and actual achievement is profound (Reschly & Hosp, 2003). This significant gap does not typically appear until students reach approximately the age of nine years old (Donovan & Cross, 2002). According to the National Research Council, the optimal years in which to implement intervention is in the early primary years – kindergarten and first grade (Donovan & Cross, 2002). A delay in providing intervention to struggling students until age 9 or later could result in students experiencing more complex and multifaceted deficits. These deficits typically continue throughout the student's school career Donovan & Cross, 2002). The impact of such a delay is intensified for ELs whose cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) (Cummins, 1984) is impeded by a learning disability.

Zehler (as cited in Keller-Allen, 2006) cited a lack of adequate training for teachers in second language acquisition, cultural sensitivity, ESL instruction and bilingual education, and pre-referral interventions in both special and general education as an obstacle to early identification for pre-referral intervention for ELs struggling academically.

Multiple studies over many years have outlined disadvantages of using the discrepancy model to identify learning disabilities. The body of knowledge continues to grow indicating that characteristics beyond discrepant IQ and achievement must be taken into consideration when students are believed to have a learning disability. Although the discrepancy model has been associated with identifying learning disabilities in students for decades, it is not believed to be the singular factor contributing to the disproportionate identification of ELs as learning disabled.

Despite her confidence in the validity of the discrepancy model, Monroe (1932) urged researchers to look beyond the quantitative measure to the qualitative data revealed by students'

responses. Monroe was the first to suggest that students' incorrect responses be analyzed and that this information be considered when designing instructional techniques to meet each students' individual needs.

The Response to Intervention framework was adapted for use in education from a medical model (Gresham, 2007). Patients who do not respond to medical treatment within the 'normal range' response are given additional treatment to bring their response to within the range expected. According to Gresham, patients are monitored and evaluated at regular intervals to determine if a treatment is effective. RtI applies tenets of the medical model in that the framework requires that student learning be measured and compared to that of grade level peers, applying research based interventions as needed, monitoring students' progress, and adjusting interventions when necessary (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Zumeta, 2008).

The term intervention was coined for use in education by Marie Clare in 1987. At that time, Clare suggested that children should not be considered for designation as LD until it was determined that the child's progress failed to accelerate despite receiving individualized, high-quality instruction. Aforementioned court cases (Diana, 1970/1973 & Larry P. (1972/1986) evidence biases in referral and identification practices for EL students and highlighted the shortcomings of the IQ/discrepancy model. Concerns about these shortcomings gave rise to the Learning Disabilities Initiative in 1997, which sought to analyze deficiencies resulting from biased instruments and referral and assessment processes (Danielson et al., 2007). Barnes and Harlacher (2008) cautioned educators the purpose of RtI is not simply a process by which to identify students for special education eligibility, but is a way to ensure a commitment to high quality research based instruction and academic success for all students.

While remediation was the focus of previous instructional models used to address the needs of at risk students, acceleration is a key feature of interventions provided under an RtI model (Lipson & Wixson, 2012). Berkeley et al. (2009) stated, "Effective interventions must be aligned with the core instructional program and focus on the specific needs of individual students as identified by effective assessment" (p. 87). Effective interventions are designed with the recognition that students respond differently to instruction/intervention. Teachers adjust intervention strategies to ensure the intervention is effective for intended students (Berkeley et al., 2009). This underscored the idea that intervention begins with core instruction and is guided by assessment. This opinion is aligned with the International Reading Association's guidelines on RtI, which stated: "RtI is first and foremost intended to prevent problems by optimizing initial language and literacy instruction" (as cited in Lipson & Wixson, 2012, p.12). RtI stems from the philosophical position that many of the gaps in students' learning are caused by inadequate instruction in the general education setting (Brown & Doolittle, 2008). This is supported by the change in special education legislation from a deficit model to a model which considers the influence the quality of instruction and the environment have upon a student's learning. According to Ardoin et al. (2005), the structural changes called for by Riley (Goals 2000) aligned with the underlying philosophy of the Response to Intervention framework which addresses the prevention of academic failure by identifying students who are struggling academically early rather than waiting for these students to fail, employs evidence based strategies to intervene with these students, monitors student progress at regular intervals to determine if the interventions are being effective, and minimizes the number of students referred for special education evaluation to those who are truly learning disabled (Ardoin et al., 2005).

Goals 2000 tasked state and local education agencies to re-examine the quality of instruction they provide, and reconsider how they identify students as at risk for academic failure.

Studies of student academic growth over time were also made part of the reforms mandated in the previously discussed legislative acts to ensure that ineffective pedagogy was not the cause of students' failure to make progress (NICHHD, 2000). This additional accountability required school leaders and teachers to overhaul the manner in which they approached teaching all students. Planning instruction around the students performing within a standard deviation of the fiftieth percentile was no longer accepted practice. Neither would allowing that some students would not/could not ever master standards because of a language difference or disability. Looking forward, teachers and administrators would be responsible for ensuring that every student made academic progress. This required the development of a standard process to not only measure student academic growth, but also to monitor the quality of instruction in the general education classroom. Consequently, the Response to Intervention (RtI) paradigm was developed and began to be implemented to varying degrees and in different forms across the United States (Zirkel, 2014).

Response to Intervention: The Framework

RtI is a tiered instructional framework through which students experiencing academic difficulties receive early intervention support (Fuchs et al., 2003). In any RtI model, universal screening is essential to identify students at risk for academic difficulty. Accurate identification of at risk students is important to ensure the correct students receive appropriate interventions.

Several studies on the topic of RtI concur that a sound program uses (a) a problem solving model to make decisions after disaggregating and analyzing data; (b) a standards based curriculum and research based instruction; (c) a comprehensive assessment system (Berkeley et

al., 2009, p. 87). Rinaldi and Samson (2008) added the model requires input and consideration by a team of educators who know the student and have expertise in a range of areas.

The problem solving model consists of four steps:

1. Identifying intervention needed – finding out what and how severe the problem is
2. Problem analysis -- ascertaining why the problem exists
3. Plan identification and implementation -- -designing a plan to address the problem;
4. Plan evaluation -- measuring the student's response to the intervention (Harlacher, Potter & Webber, 2015 p. 217):

IDEIA did not stipulate or suggest a particular protocol for implementing RtI. As a result of this legislation, several multi-tiered approaches to support struggling students have become increasingly accepted as best practice by researchers and practitioner. Prevalent researchers studying RtI describe two models. The first model uses a three tier approach and the second model uses a four tier approach. Both models are generally accepted as effective methods for providing support to struggling students according to the provisions of IDEIA.

In the first model, Fuchs and Fuchs (2006b) supported a three tiered methodology, wherein, only one layer of intervention distinguishes general education from special education. The second model uses four tiers (Heartland, 2007). Tiers one and two are comparable to the three tier (Fuchs and Fuchs) model. The third tier distinguishes the two models. The four tier protocol uses school and district teams to analyze student achievement gaps and instructional deficiencies and prescribe interventions believed necessary to increase student learning. In this model, two layers of intervention distinguish general education from special education (Heartland, 2007).

Irrespective of the protocol used, the levels of instruction in the RtI paradigm are labeled as Tier 1, Tier 2, Tier 3 and sometimes 4, and the intensity of intervention increases from Tier 1 to Tier 3/4 (Gilbert, Compton, Fuchs, D., & Fuchs, L., 2012). Tier 1 is universal in scope and consists of high quality research based differentiated instruction within the general education classroom. Every student is administered universal screenings in reading, writing, and math. These screening assessments are intended to assist educators in identifying students at risk for low academic achievement (Fuchs et al., 2006a; Reschly et al., 2009).

Overview of the Tiers

High Quality Research Based Core Instruction. RtI was initially formally introduced in Public Law 108-446 (2004). This law contained language which allowed states and LEAs to measure the degree to which a student responded to research based interventions as a means to identify that student as learning disabled (LD). Interventions were determined as research based if they were found to be "based on practices that have produced verifiable results through research studies" (Berkeley et al., 2009, p. 89).

The 2002 PCESE Report suggested many students "who are placed into special education are instructional casualties and not students with disabilities" (p.26). In the report, The Commission asserted many of the challenges students identifed with learning disabilities face are not related to deficits in the student, but are the result of inappropriate or ineffective instruction (Zirkel, 2014). Etscheidt (2013) later affirmed this assertion by emphasizing that one of the keystones of an RtI model is that inadequate instruction can be eliminated as a cause of lack of progress when students receive evidence-based Tier 1 instruction. Bartlett, Etscheidt, and Weis (2013) continued by stating it is "not deficits in the student, but ineffective or inappropriate instruction that is largely responsible for difficulties learning disabled students face" (p. 183).

This emphasized the notion that Tier 1 core instruction must be grounded in scientifically based research. (Shinn et al., 2007).

Burns and Gibbons (2008) stressed the importance of designing a program which can be supported by ample research evidence. The rigor and robustness of a school's core instruction must be analyzed before an effective RtI model can be implemented (Burns & Gibbons, 2008). According to Ball and Christ (2012), two of the most critical elements of the RtI framework are high quality research based core instruction and data-based decision making. In an effective RtI model, data are used to steer decisions as to which students receive interventions, what interventions they receive, and to measure the effectiveness of those interventions.

Bollman, Silberglitt, and Gibbons (2007) likened the value of a strong core instructional program to the foundation of a well-built house. A well designed RtI model needs strong core instruction upon which the upper tiers may be balanced. School teams are obliged to analyze grade-level and school wide data to determine the needs of their students and design core instruction around those needs. This backward design process establishes the foundation of the model and precludes placing unnecessary strain on the upper tiers of the model (Bollman et al., 2007).

Many studies have been conducted regarding the effectiveness of interventions, and several factors were found to have strong positive effect on student academic achievement in all content areas. The quality of core instruction was identified as one of the variables having the strongest positive impact in all areas, and appropriate assessment is the cornerstone of effective intervention (VanDerHeyden & Codding, 2014). School teams must systematically examine and monitor the effectiveness of their core instruction to ensure at least 80% of students receiving only core instruction meet the standard for proficiency. Lipson and Wixson (2012) found first

grade students whose teacher adjusted instruction to parallel their changes in skill and knowledge saw a higher rate of growth in reading comprehension than students for whom instruction was not adjusted to meet their changing needs. Similarly, Ball and Christ (2012) determined that using the level of skill a student had acquired as a gauge to adjust the level of instruction received demonstrated a positive interaction effect.

In a study of student outcomes in multi-level instructional models, Berkeley et al. (2009) supported the strengthening of core instruction by expressing concern the RtI framework over-emphasizes Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions with little regard for ensuring a rigorous core or Tier 1 instruction. Teachers must know what their students know and what they can do each day and use this information to adjust their instruction. Scanlon, Anderson, and Sweeney (2010) suggested, "The role of a teacher is that of a skilled collaborator. In this role, teachers must be adept at evaluating children's current level of competence and deciding what they are ready to learn next and, they must become facile at modifying the demands of the task so that it suits the needs of each child" (p. 27-28). A valid concern, however, is that educators may not have the skills or training required to engage in dialogue that is centered on core instruction.

Fuchs and Fuchs (2006b) examined multiple RtI models and concluded that in every model students in Tier 1 receive scientific, research based instruction which proves to be successful for the vast majority of students. Tier 1 instruction occurs in the general classroom setting with the goal of preventing students' needing additional academic support (Wilkinson et al., 2006). According to Mastropieri and Scruggs (2005), an effective RtI model provides ,research based effectual instruction in core academics within the general education classroom. The primary goal of Tier 1 is that every student in every classroom receives effective evidence based instruction. This focus on instructional practices in the general education classroom is

viewed as preventing the inappropriate identification of learning disabled (Willkinson et al., 2006).

Researchers in multiple studies have demonstrated the positive impact high quality research based classroom instruction has on the academic progress of ELs (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2013; Linan-Thompson et al., 2006; Olsen, 2013). Eighty percent of special education referrals are initiated by general classroom teachers, therefore, a focus on general education instruction is necessary. After it has been determined that a student is not an instructional casualty resulting from lack of effective classroom instruction, the classroom teacher is key to ensuring the student receives Tier 2 and/or Tier 3 intervention in the manner intended and needed by the student. Without question, every teacher plays an important role in the successful implementation of the RtI process. It is fitting that teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of the process be considered.

If a student does not respond to high quality research based Tier 1 instruction similarly to others in their grade level, students are placed in Tier 2 intervention. Tier 2 is small group instruction for which 10-15% of students are identified as eligible through universal screening, and their progress is closely monitored. This intervention is provided in addition to the academic support all students receive in Tier 1 classroom instruction. In the second tier, students are provided intervention in the areas in which they demonstrate difficulties. Teachers collaborate with a team of colleagues to decide what supports the student needs to be success in the classroom. Interventions must be research based and student progress must be measured regularly to determine if the intervention is effective (Wilkinson et al., 2006). Students making less than adequate progress in Tier 2 are referred for evaluation for special education services (Fuchs and Fuchs, 2006b) or placement in Tier 3 (Heartland model). Fuchs and Fuchs (2006b)

encouraged flexibility in Tier 3 interventions which allow students to move between special education and general education services. In the Fuchs model, students who demonstrate sufficient growth at this level of intervention could be exited from the special education program into general education tiers. Like Tier 2, this tier is characterized by research based interventions and more frequent progress analysis. These interventions occur in smaller groups, using more intensive delivery model, extended duration, increased frequency and small intervals during which participants' progress is monitored and assessed (Speece & Walker, 2007). Typically, Tier 3 intervention targets specific foundational skills and is the most varied. This level of intervention is intended for approximately 5-10% of the general population (Batsche et al., 2005). Speece and Walker (2007) stated that students who remain resistant to interventions after participating in this third tier of problem solving are considered as being at high risk of academic failure and are considered special education students in some models (Fuchs model). According to Reschly and Bergstrom (2009), and Shinn et al. (2007), failure to progress in Tier 3 could result in the student being considered for special education eligibility (Heartland model). Much of the information required to determine a student's eligibility at this point will have been gathered through problem solving efforts employed by the team throughout Tiers 1, 2, and 3.

Although several variations of the RtI framework are discussed in the research, in every model Tier 1 refers to high quality research based core academic instruction for every student in every classroom (Shinn et al., 2007). The middle tiers employ monitoring of student progress at prescribed intervals and the use of research based interventions. The highest tier in every model involves the consideration of a students' eligibility for special education support (Shinn et al., 2007).

The State of Tennessee recommends and the district participant in this study employs a three tier model and does not include the evaluation for special education support as one of the tiers. Figure 1 illustrates the RtI framework which has been implemented by personnel in the school district participating in this study.

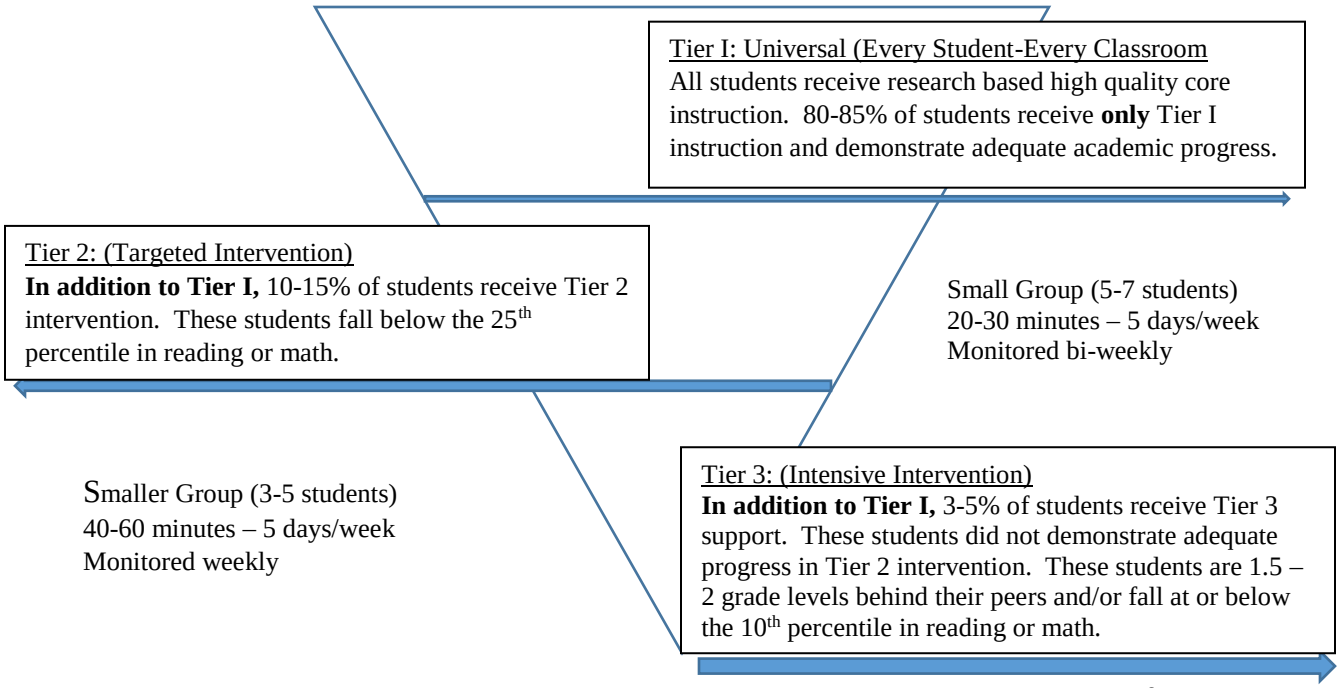

Figure 1: The RtI Model recommended by administrators within the Department of Education - State of Tennessee and implemented by personnel at the school district participating in this study.

Universal Screening. The first step in identifying students at risk for learning difficulties is referred to as universal screening. It is the means by which students who struggle to learn despite receiving scientific, evidence-based instruction are identified (Gilbert et al., 2012). In most cases, universal screening is administered to every student three times per year, first in the fall, then winter, and finally spring. Universal screening measures are short assessments targeting a specific skill or set of skills (e.g., letter sound fluency, phoneme segmentation). These measures are highly predictive of student learning (Fuchs et al., 2006a).

Research on universal screening has been completed in the area of reading. However, research support for the use of universal screening in the areas of writing, math, and behavior

continues to be developed(Gilbert et al., 2012). In a typical RtI model, students are screened in one or more skill areas. Students identified as at risk for learning or behavior difficulties participate in evidence-based interventions in the deficit area(s). Fuchs et al. (2006a) recommended identifying students as early as kindergarten or first grade to prevent significant academic deficits before they begin. Detecting potential problems early increases the probability that students will develop sufficient proficiency to perform at a level comparable to their age alike peers. Screening students early in their learning, though, can contribute to false positive or false negative errors. False positive errors occur when students are identified as at risk, but are not truly at risk. False negative errors occur when students are not identified as at risk, when, in fact, they are at risk as indicated by their performance on subsequent measures (Gilbert et al., 2012). "For a prevention system to work effectively, procedures for determining risk must yield a high percentage of true positives while identifying a manageable risk pool by limiting false positives" (Fuchs et al., 2007, p. 312).

Pre-Referral Intervention. The number of students diagnosed as learning disabled increased by more than 300% between the years 1976 and 2000 (Woodward, 2004). According to Woodward, research established the discrepancy model of identification may be harmful to students in that students' challenges are not recognized and responded to until after they fail, which typically occurs in upper elementary years or later. These students' learning disabilities are even more difficult to counteract since students do not get the help they need in their early school years. Acknowledging the importance of early treatment of learning difficulties, pre-referral intervention was suggested to address the disproportionate representation of ELs in special education (Foorman et al., 1997). Madden et al. (1991) defined pre-referral instruction as "supplementary instructional services provided early in students' schooling, and that are intense

enough to bring at-risk students quickly to a level at which they can profit from high-quality instruction" (p. 594). According to Ortiz (2002), the use of pre-referral interventions could "reduce the number of students at risk of failing, of being inaccurately identified as having a learning disability, and of being inappropriately referred to remedial or special education programs" (p. 48). However, research conducted between 2000 and 2004 indicates that educators were reluctant to use pre-referral instruction to identify ELs with learning disabilities because they did not have the knowledge or training to do so (Conway et al., 2000; Wilkinson et al., 2006). Wilkinson stated, "By the time teachers request [evaluation] their interest in problem solving may be half-hearted and with good reason" (p. 41).

The research on the use of pre-referral instruction with ELs was lacking when IDEIA 2004 allowed states to use alternative, progress monitoring procedures and measures of students' response to research based intervention (Orosco & Klingner, 2010). However, educators began to see the need to focus on individualizing their instruction practices to meet each of their students' needs and began to consider the value of differentiation as a means of pre-referral intervention (Tomlinson, 2014). Tomlinson defined differentiation as the practice of recognizing every student's individual learning needs, building upon their strengths and accommodating their difficulties so that all students learn. Thus, the need for special education services is decreased.

IDEIA 2004 recommended the use of the RtI framework to monitor academic progress of ELs as preferable to the existing discrepancy model because it allowed for the consideration of contextual factors that impacted students' performance (Vaughn & Fuchs, 2003; Harris-Murri et al., 2006). VanDerHeyden and Codding (2014) stressed advantages of using RtI over previous models of identification. Among the benefits, they highlighted RtI's use of a risk model, its

potential to identify learning difficulties earlier, its potential to decrease questions about bias, and the focus on student outcomes.

Monitoring Student Progress. After identifying students in need of services in Tier 2 and Tier 3 of the RtI model, grade level teams must develop a schedule to review and monitor each students progress at four to six week intervals (Ball & Christ, 2012).

Once provided the correct tier of intervention, students progress must be monitored at regular intervals. Correct interpretation of progress monitoring assessment data is central to designing effective instructional programs and guiding decisions concerning the rate of student progress. According to the National Center on Student Progress Monitoring,

> progress monitoring, when implemented correctly, offers several potential benefits, including: (a) accelerated student learning; (b) more intentional instructional decisions; (c) record of student progress; (d) informed communication with families and professionals around student progress; (e) teachers setting higher expectations for students; (f) possibly fewer special education referrals (NCSPM, n.d.).

Educating English Learners

Educators must be familiar with historical and political impacts of the policies surrounding current instructional practices of English learners today. Several court cases were brought against school districts during the early 1970s for discriminating against students with disabilities by segregating them from the general population. Students who were English Learners with disabilities were included in these cases. Federal disability legislation for culturally and linguistically diverse students was precipitated by social and political climate and significant discrimination cases. A lawsuit brought against Monterey County, California school system alleged students whose native language was Spanish were incorrectly classified as mentally retarded based on the results of an IQ test administered in English (Artiles & Ortiz, 2002). In response to this legal action, the court ordered all Mexican-American children

identified as eligible for special education services be re-evaluated in both their language of origin and English or by using nonverbal IQ tests. One result of this decree was that state and local education leaders in California subsequently required any measure used to determine eligibility for special education be corroborated through consideration of the student's cultural and academic experience, developmental history and achievement background. Mercer (1973) concluded that discriminatory practices surrounding EL evaluation results in disproportionate EL representation in special education programs.

In 1972, U. S. Congress investigated the degree to which the needs of EL and non-EL students with disabilities were being met. The report concluded overwhelmingly, that students with disabilities in U. S. public schools were either not receiving special education services or were receiving inadequate or were receiving inappropriate services (Wright & Wright, 2007). Consequently, the procedures for identifying ELs with disabilities was addressed in the 1974 amendment to the ESEA (P. L. 93-380). According to Ovando et al. the 1974 amendment to ESEA was foundational to legislation governing the education of students with disabilities in public schools in the United States. Through this amendment, policymakers required that ELs believed to have learning disabilities be tested using nondiscriminatory measures (Ovando et al., 2006).

Larry P. v. Riles (1979) set precedent that instruments used to evaluate any minority student for learning disabilities or cognitive challenges be culturally and linguistically unbiased. The development of special education policy for ELs was influenced by researchers who offered irrefutable evidence of the inequitable identification practices used for minority students. Dunn's classic article (1968) asserted students who are racially, linguistically, ethnically, and

socioeconomically different than middle-class, white, English speaking Americans have been "mis-, under-, and over-identified" as having or not having learning disabilities.

Cultural Differences

According to the U. S. Census Bureau (2010) a language other than English is spoken in more than 20% of households in the United States. While it is essential that language be considered when working with ELs, other sociocultural aspects of a student's development must also be considered. Teachers in U. S. schools generally do not share the same cultural background as their EL students. Between 2000 and 2010, the number of people in the U. S. self-identifying as non-White (alone or in combination) increased by nearly 59%. The majority of this group self-identified as Hispanic (U. S. Census Bureau, 2010).

Despite the increasingly culturally and linguistically diverse student population in schools across the United States, educators remain mostly White/non-Hispanic females (Miller, Strosnider, & Dooley, 2000). A review of 2010-2011 school characteristics revealed more than 75% of educators in schools in the United States are identified as White/non-Hispanic females. In contrast, slightly more than 50% of students in U. S. school are identified as non-White (NCES, 2016). The cultural disparity between teachers and students is decreasing but not at a pace which will allow the gap to be closed in the foreseeable future. (Morrier, Irving, Dandy, Dmitriyev & Ukeje, 2007).

In response to these demographic disproportions educational policymakers in several states focused on recruiting teachers from culturally diverse backgrounds. Although several state departments of education have required university teacher preparation programs include cultural and linguistic diversity coursework, these efforts have not been largely successful. (Morrier, Irving, Dandy, Dmitriyev & Ukeje, 2007; Miller, Strosnider, & Dooley, 2002). There is limited

research regarding the effect linguistic and cultural diversity training has on teacher candidates' attitudes about and instructional approaches with students in their classroom from diverse backgrounds (Trent et al., 2008). Trent et al. (2008) suggested that extant research on the effect of cultural and linguistic training shows promise in the general education classroom, but the effect upon special education setting has not been studied.

Notwithstanding the student population demographics and legislation that mandated equality of instruction for all learners, the quality of instruction ELs receive has persisted in falling short of that required for non-English learners (Garcia and Cuellar, 2006). When students begin to show signs of academic struggle, these demographic disparities exacerbate the inequities. The cultural differences between teachers and students often causes misinterpretation of the root cause of the student's difficulties. Collier (2001) stated, "Indeed, one of the greatest challenges educators face is determining whether a student's academic difficulties are due to cultural or linguistic differences or an actual learning disabilities" (p. 9). Klingner and Harry (2006) studied teacher referral practices for ELs. The study found many teachers feel special education services can prevent ELs from slipping through the cracks and refer students even when the student is not learning disabled. Placing a non-learning disabled EL in a special education class will likely fail to ameliorate areas of concern and could be detrimental to the student's second language development and academic growth (Collier, 2001). Further, such inappropriate placement of students in a special education program violates the student's right to be educated in the least restrictive environment (LRE) (IDEIA, 2004).

Collier (2001) cautioned against considering special education as a form of academic protection, stating the supports ELs require to acquire language are significantly different than supports a student with a learning disability require. Interventions for students believed to have a

learning disability typically focus on phonics and phonemic awareness. However, the primary areas of concerns for English learners are vocabulary and comprehension. Failure to address these skills frequently creates a gap in English learners' reading skills. Stringfield and Wayman (2006) encouraged the use interventions that target text-level skills as well as word attack skills.

ELs often appear to be fluent, when, in fact, they have only acquired an early intermediate level of English proficiency (Klingner & Harry, 2006). Being orally proficient in a language is often mistaken for the level of proficiency required in that language for students to perform successfully in school. Numerous studies have shown that ELs demonstrate proficiency in basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) or social English in two years or less, but it takes students at least eight years to acquire the level of proficiency required to master grade level academic standards. This level of proficiency is referred to as cognitive and academic language proficiency (CALP) (Cummins, 1984; Tabors, 1997; Lake & Pappamihiel, 2003; Peisner-Fienberg, 2007; Hardin, Mereoiu, Hung & Roach-Scott, 2009; Olsen, 2013). After attaining academic English proficiency ELs often continue to learn at a slower rate than native English speakers because academic gaps that occurred while they were acquiring English remain (Barrera, Corso & MacPherson, 2003; Olsen, 2013).

Limited research exists detailing the language acquisition process and concurrent academic achievement of English learners. Such research would allow state and local educational agencies to develop profiles to define a standard for academic and concomitant linguistic development of English Learners (Lesaux, 2006). Lesaux (2006) and Stringfield and Wayman (2006) suggested lack of training or access to resources to effectively differentiate academic content for English learners add to the challenges teachers face in meeting the needs of their English learner students.

The RtI framework is intended for use with all students, including English learners. Implementation poses unique challenges around the instruction of English learners (Fuchs et al. (2007). Stringfield and Wayman (2006) considered one inner-city school's implementation of a modified RtI model. The school modified the framework to maximize resources and use alternative intervention methods for English learners. The researchers concluded classroom teachers would benefit from professional development around academic instruction for students who are simultaneously acquiring English as an additional language. Further, Klingner and Edwards (2006) stated that English learners can be denied the opportunity to learn when instruction is not linguistically accessible. If students are not provided appropriate instruction, referral for special education cannot be determined through lack of response to intervention. Many teachers do not receive adequate training in English learner pedagogy and assessment practices (Orosco & Klingner, 2010). Lesaux (2006) suggested that providing teachers with information to deepen their understanding of the language acquisition process would allow them to identify and discern learning difficulties related to language acquisition as opposed to challenges related to skill or content mastery.

RtI is in the early stages of development in U. S. schools, and research on the use of the framework with ELs is scarce (Linan-Thompson & Ortiz, 2009). Notwithstanding the limited research, existing studies indicate the effects of RtI on outcomes of students from linguistically diverse backgrounds are positive (Linan-Thompson & Ortiz, 2009). A topic raised in studies surrounding the use of RtI with ELs is the lack of consideration of cultural and linguistic factors in the assessment and referral processes. Linan-Thompson and Ortiz (2009) suggested eight characteristics must exist within a school system to develop an academic program in which ELs can perform successfully. Four of these characteristics refer to the school climate and culture,

and four refer to the quality of core instruction and the RtI processes used. All eight characteristics are influenced by the teachers' perceptions of the potential effectiveness of the RtI program with ELs. Linan-Thompson and Ortiz (2009) concluded to prevent inappropriate identification of ELs as learning disabled, the RtI process must allow the unique language and cultural needs of the student to be considered. Hosp and Madyun (2007) supported this assertion and added that parents of all students, and particularly of ELs should be included in every phase of the process in that they can provide RtI team members insight into each student's academic and personal experiences.

This section summarized the research that support the consideration of the sociocultural context of learning, particularly of language learning. RtI offers opportunities for all students, however questions remain around practices that must be taken to ensure its effectiveness with ELs. Considering the historical practice of inappropriate identification for and disproportionate representation of ELs for special education programs, the studies affirm the need to consider the unique needs of students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds in discussions surrounding academic struggles.

Students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds have been disproportionately represented in special education programs for decades. IDEIA 2004 allowed states the option to use RtI as an alternative identification method. RtI was believed to be a framework through which the number of inappropriate EL referrals for special education services could be reduced (Fuchs et al., 2003). However, few studies analyzed the use of RtI with ELs (Orosco & Klingner, 2010). The following section reviews research conducted between 2004 and 2012 surrounding the use of the pre-referral instruction and the RtI framework with ELs to determine eligibility for special education services.

Use of Pre-Referral Intervention and RtI with English Learners

Prior to the passage of IDEIA 2004 students believed to have a learning disability were identified using the IQ/achievement discrepancy model. This model was believed to have several limitations, many of which are addressed in the RtI framework (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006b). Gresham (2007) cited one of the limitations as the absence of evidence that a comparison of achievement and IQ test instruments adequately measure a student's academic aptitude. Gresham suggested the RtI framework dealt with this weakness by looking at a student's rate of academic growth in addition to their current performance level. A learning disability may be indicated when both measures are below what is expected for students of the same age and grade. Fuchs, Fuchs and Speece (2002) referred to this as the dual discrepancy (DD) aspect of the RtI framework. The assumption behind this paradigm is that when provided with quality instruction and remedial services, a student without disabilities will make satisfactory progress.

Linan-Thompson et al. (2007) concluded the practice of evaluating ELs for dual discrepancies has potential to reduce disproportionate representations of ELs in special education programs, but emphasized the importance of eliminating ineffective instruction as an influence upon either measure.

Shinn et al. (1986) studied methods by which to monitor student progress and use the information gained to adjust instruction. This work led to the development of curriculum based measures (CBM) which provide information about current levels of performance and growth as well as overall academic knowledge and mastery of discrete skills (Fuchs et al., 2007). Wiley and Deno (2005) stated the use of CBM with ELs has demonstrated promise. However, Rhodes et al. (2005) suggested the CBMs measurement of a standardized skillset may not align with

what students have been taught and this misalignment could reduce the validity of CBMs with ELs.

One limitation of the discrepancy model is the lack of consistency in implementation and procedure (Klingner & Harry, 2006). This is also cited as a limitation of the RtI framework. The flexibility afforded states to choose an RtI model that meet their needs is ideal in that student populations differ amongst states. Frequently, though, EL students have a high mobility rate and this lack of consistency could exacerbate gaps in students' academic growth (Danielson et al., 2007). In keeping with this belief, Klingner and Harry (2006) found the flexibility frequently results in inconsistent consideration of the impact of cultural and linguistic factors upon a student's academic progress. The RtI framework puts many of the most effective evidence based practices together, but these practices are only as effective as the team of educators collaborating around every factor in each student case (Klingner & Harry, 2006).

The discrepancy model delayed intervention until after a student had demonstrated failure. The RtI framework seeks to identify learning difficulties early and intervene at the initial signs of struggle through high quality research based general classroom instruction. This emphasis on providing effective Tier 1 instruction can prevent many ELs from being inaptly referred for special education evaluation. Eliminating the impact of poor instruction, measuring a student's progress and making instructional adjustments accordingly allows every student opportunities to be successful. This is especially important when working with students who are acquiring a new language and academic content concurrently.

The research on the use of the RtI framework with ELs is limited and while the existing research suggests the model has not fully addressed the limitations of the IQ/achievement discrepancy framework, the potential benefits outweigh these limitations. Most significant is the

elimination of fixing responsibility upon students and their family for academic weaknesses. RtI requires that not only academic factors be consider, but social and linguistic/cultural factors be considered as well, since each of these factors impacts student learning.

Although there is limited research on the use of RtI with ELs, it is clear that further examination of this topic is merited. The majority of the research published between 2004 and 2012 used quantitative methodology to examine the implementation of interventions with elementary level ELs by researchers, and. A gap exists in the body of literature examining qualitative studies of K-12 teachers' procedures and perceptions of the processes used to identify ELs as having a specific learning disability.

Quantitative Research

Gilbertson and Bluck (2006) used quantitative methods to assess the use of wait time, speed drills and modeling of sounds on kindergarten ELs letter naming fluency. The primary purpose of the study was to examine the impact the manipulation of pacing of intervention has upon the acquisition of reading proficiency of ELs who had not responded to effective core academic instruction. The performance of participant students was compared to the performance level and growth rates of students who had comparable language proficiency, background, and experiences. Researchers also sought to determine the effect the selection of intervention had upon decisions regarding student responsiveness to intervention.

Following a pre-intervention screening, a single subject alternating treatment design was used to compare the relative effects of two instructional interventions with English learners on letter naming rates. An alternating treatments design was selected to compare the two treatment effects within a small window of time upon an individual without removing a potentially beneficial treatment from that participant (Gilbertson & Bluck, 2006). These

interventions were paced at 1 second and 5 seconds. Four kindergarten students performing below the average letter naming level and learning rate than other ELL classmates participated in the study. The fast-paced intervention consisted of a one second paced letter modeling and one second response wait time followed by a 1 second interval. The slower paced intervention consisted of 5 second modeling, response wait time, and intervals. The slower paced intervention resulted in greater increases in letter naming rates for three of the participant students as compared to the quicker paced intervention and baseline condition. All students initially demonstrated mastery level during the slower paced intervention. While gains were initially low, the study concluded ELs with reading difficulties responded after the introductory lessons, when pacing was adjusted to slightly exceed the EL's current rate of reading. The results suggest interventions provided to ELs in kindergarten and first grade may need to be provided for longer periods of time before responsiveness can be measured. The study was limited by the measurement of a single academic skill as well as by the small sample size.

In a similar study, Gilbertson, Maxfield, and Hughes (2007) studied the effect of reading intervention upon six pre-school ELs who demonstrated pre-reading skills below that of their grade level peers . The research examined the effect of 'listening and pointing' upon the letter naming fluency rates of pre-school ELs. The effect of 'listening and pointing' with added wait time was compared to 'see and say,' the letter naming method in use. 'See and say' did not include additional response wait time. The measurements used to determined intervention effect were performance on a single letter naming screening instrument, performance on a single timed reading assessment, and performance on a single letter-naming retention assessment. The study concluded that 'see and say' was moderately more effective than the 'listening and pointing' intervention for letter naming fluency for all six participants. Four of the six participants

demonstrated growth in letter naming retention after receiving 'see and say' intervention. Study concluded that visual interventions are of greater benefit to struggling ELs than increased response time. This study was limited by small sample size and the examination of a single academic skills. Although both studies were limited by the isolation of specific skills and small sample size, these studies indicate that low-performing ELs made at least modest gains when targeted interventions were used.

Gunn et al. (2000, 2002) studied the effect of daily reading intervention on kindergarten ELs who had demonstrated difficulties in learning to read. Five months after the intervention began, student were assessed in the basic reading areas of word reading, nonsense word reading, and fluency. Results indicated students demonstrated gains in nonsense word reading, but not in the areas of word reading or fluency. The same students were provided a second year of intervention, and data collected at the end of the second year indicated the ELs who received the intensive intervention significantly outperformed the ELs who did not in all foundational reading skills. Gunn et al. conducted a follow up study in 2005, and concluded ELs receiving the intensive intervention demonstrated gains in word reading, fluency, and oral reading, but not in vocabularly, comprehension, or nonsense word reading. The researchers concluded the effect for nonsense word reading intervention levelled off after the first year of intervention. However, the positive effect upon oral reading fluency continued when compared to the group that did not receive the intervention. These studies are limited by inconsistent intervention treatment and student selection criteria.

Between 2006 and 2009, Vaughn and Linan-Thompson et al. conducted multiple studies of the effectiveness of pre-referral interventions in Spanish and English for ELs in kindergarten through second grade who were struggling to learn to read (Linan-Thompson, Vaughn et al.,

2006; Vaughn et al., 2006; Vaughn et al., 2006; Linan-Thompson, Cirino, & Vaughn, 2007; Cirino et al., 2009). These studies involved 215 ELs who were randomly assigned to either a control group or one of two intervention groups. One intervention was conducted in English, and the other was conducted in Spanish. The intervention groups received small group instruction for decoding in Spanish or English, fluency, spelling, and comprehension for one school year. Vaughn et al. (2009) conducted a follow-up study one year after the intervention ended. Both groups were assessed in the same language (English) in the areas of decoding, fluency, spelling, and comprehension. Data analysis evidenced that both English and Spanish intervention groups made gains which exceeded the English only control group. Although the lack of a thorough description of the student and teacher participants limit this study, the researchers concluded that structured, systematic intervention was an effective practice to support the development of reading skills and monitor progress of ELs believed to have specific learning disability in the area of reading.

The aforementioned quantitative studies were conducted studying ELs believed to have specific learning disability. Denton et al. (2004) subsequently studied the impact of intervention on ELs in grades two through five with identified reading deficiencies. The study compared the effect of the impact of reading intervention on 19 ELs to that upon the control group of 14 ELs. Intervention sessions targeting decoding skills were administered by the researchers to the treatement group and results were compared to the control group. Analysis of the data indicated the treatment group evidenced more growth than the control group in real word reading, but not in the areas of nonsense word reading, fluency or comprehension, and neither group demonstrated significant growth at the conclusion of the study (Denton et al., 2004).

Denton et al. (2008) studied the impact of a balanced reading intervention over 13 weeks upon 20 middle school ELs to that of the control group. The control group consisted of 18 ELs identified as having a learning disability and receiving reading instruction in a special education setting. The intervention was provided 40 minutes each day used ESL strategies to provide instruction in fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. Analysis of the data indicated the group receiving the intervention did not show greater improvement than the control group in the areas of word recognition, comprehension, or fluency. The study suggested neither group demonstrated significant growth over the 13 week intervention. The researchers concluded middle-school ELs identified as having a learning disability may need more targeted and intense intervention than was provided to the treatment group. The intervention in these studies were conducted by the researchers which limits the studies. Additionally, the study was limited by the small sample size.

The literature discussed in this section did not include thorough descriptions of the academic, cultural/linguistic or socioeconomic backgrounds of the students, general school population, or the classroom or intervention teachers. Literature surrounding the use of academic intervention with ELs supports the contribution contextual characteristics make upon a student's second language acquisition (Lynch & Hanson, 2004), reading skill development (Artiles et al., 2003), and possible subsequent identification as learning disabled (Brown, 2004).

As mentioned previously, the quantitative examinations of the effect of intervention on ELs were conducted by the research teams themselsves. Klingner and Edwards (2006) posited that significant differences often exist between controlled studies and authentic practice. Bronfenbrenner (as cited in Wertsch, 2005) suggested that although controlled studies provide

valuable information, the real value of experimental research is to support contextual and phenomenological credibility in studies conducted in natural settings by practitioners.

Qualitative Research

Lynch and Hanson (2004), Artiles (2003), Gutierrez-Clellan (2005), and Brown (2004) suggested that demographic and contextual factors contribute to EL academic progress and language acquisition and should be considered in the process of determining ELs eligibility for special education services. Bronfenbrenner (as cited in Wertsch, 2005) suggested that amongst these contextual factors are the sociocultural values of the school, district and state within which a student functions. This systems approach has underpinned many qualitative studies in education since Bronfenbrenner introduced the concept in the late 1970s. Taking a systems approach to considering the effectiveness of the RtI Framework allows "for an examination of real-life situations in which all influences on a student's learning environment become central to the proposed hypothesis and observed phenomenon (Bronfenbrenner, as cited in Wertsch, 2005).

The qualitative studies surrounding this topic are limited, and the studies selected for inclusion in this review were published since 2001 when NCLB was ratified. A review of the literature related to the use of the RtI framework with ELs suggests teacher perceptions are not considered when studies are conducted. This is significant, according to Kea and Utley (1998, p. 45), in that "What teachers perceive, believe, say, and do can disable or empower multicultural sudents with and without disabilities."

Klingner and Harry (2006) conducted a qualitative study over three years which concentrated on the procedures used for determining eligibility of ELs for special education programs and concluded the processes used contributed to the disproportionate identification of ELs (Klingner & Harry, 2006). Darling-Hammond (2009) stated that although teachers play

active roles in the implementation of school policy, their perspectives are seldom presented when discussing the effectiveness of school change.

Klingner and Harry (2006) studied the use of interventions with struggling minority students. This qualitative study represents the most comprehensive study of the details of the special education process for students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. The study involved twelve schools with various percentages of minority populations. The research finding indicated evidence of institutional bias which resulted in the placement of the weakest teachers at the schools with the highest levels of minority students. Transcripts of teacher interviews demonstrate that teachers at these schools routinely blamed students for academic deficits. Teachers stated their belief that students were learning disabled as a result of environmental factors at home and that little could be done by teachers to decrease the academic gap between minority and non-minority students. The researchers concluded that inadequate instructional practices and curriculae in schools with high percentages of minority students and English learners contribute to academic struggle/failure which frequently results in referral for special education services. Klingner and Harry (2006) cited several instances typifying the failure of school personnel to acknowledge the impact language acquisition issues could have upon students' academic performance. This study is limited to the schools examined and the timeframe during which they were examined.

Shippen et al. (2009) used qualitative methodology to study teacher perceptions of the disproportionate representation of cultural and linguistic minority students in special education programs within a school district. The researchers concluded that that teachers are aware that minority students are not represented in special education programs in proportion to their non-minority peers, but were not able to give specific reasons for this disproportionality (Shippen et

al., 2009). Shippen et al. (2009) noted teacher participants expressed confusion about the referral process, assessments, and classroom intervention. General education teacher participants voiced concerns the referral process did not prevent failure for students who were struggling academically and that the process was ineffective in closing the gap between these students and their non-minority peers. Special education teacher participants articulated the need for culturally and linguistically neutral assessment instruments (Shippen et al., 2009). Both general and special education teachers expressed insecurity as to what instructional strategies are most effective with English learners. Shippen et al. (2009) concluded this insecurity impacted teachers because their efforts were more intimidating and their practices less effectual. Shippen et al. (2009) cited teacher concerns that the intervention process is too lengthy. Students have failed resoundingly by the time academic deficits are assessed, interventions are employed, and progress or lack of progress has been monitored to determine the level of student responsiveness. In the interim, valuable instructional time has been lost (Shippen et al., 2009). Shippen et al. (2009) added teachers were unsure as to when to refer ELs who continued to struggle for special education evaluation, and indicated that teachers felt pressure about initiating any EL referrals.

The study concluded that teachers had concerns about when to administer academic assessments to ELs. Teachers voiced apprehension about waiting to administer assessment because students' needs would not be addressed without this measure, but were also fearful that administering assessments too soon might be inconclusive because a student's English proficiency might not provide an accurate measure of academic ability (Shippen et al., 2009). This study was limited to the participant school examined.

Orosco and Klingner (2010) used qualitative methodology to conduct research on the effectiveness of the RtI model with Latino English learners. The study involved the observation

of teachers' instructional and assessment practices during intervention with 8 ELs in an urban elementary school. Following the observations participant teachers were interviewed regarding their instructional practices prior to and subsequent to the implementation of RtI in their school and district. Teachers were also asked to share personal reflections about the implementation process and the benefit of the framework upon English learners.

The study examined the relationship between teachers' perceptions and understanding of the RtI framework and the instructional practices used with English learners. Klingner and Harry (2006), Klingner and Edwards (2006), and VanDerHeyden et al. (2005) asserted when a student who is an English learner struggles academically, teachers must consider whether the student has received appropriate research based high quality instruction. The study also posited the contextual quality of the instruction must be examined before the existence of a learning deficit or disability can be considered (as cited in Orosco and Klingner, 2010). Fuchs et al. (2003) suggested that contextual factors and degree of fidelity with which RtI has been implemented are not examined closely enough prior to referral for special education eligibility is considered. Orosco and Klingner (2010) posited that teachers often focus on within student deficits and home environment and less on instructional practices. The study supported the earlier work of Klingner and Edwards (2006) which concluded a gap exists in understanding the importance of the role of the general education teacher in implementing RtI framework with English learners. This study is limited by small sample size.

Greenfield, Rinaldi, Proctor, and Cardarelli (2010) studied general education teachers' perceptions of after the initial year of RtI implementation. Interviews were conducted with eight teachers in an urban elementary school to ascertain their perspective of the RtI reform measure. Data analysis indicated participants found special education referral and identification for Els

was among the most challenging process pieces of implementation. Themes which emerged indicated teachers were unsure of the characteristics of language acquisition in contrast to the characteristics of learning disability. Teacher participants expressed confusion over when to refer ELs for special education evaluation. Since participants were not often confident in their knowledge of the impact contextual factors had upon the academic performance of ELs teacher participants often did not refer ELs they believe had learning disabilities to avoid inappropriate referrals. Participants similarly expressed a lack of confidence in their knowledge of the RtI framework. The study was conducted after the initial year of implementation of the RtI framework within the participating school. Limitations to this study include small sample size and the limited duration of the study.

Gaps in Qualitative Research

Although the literature surrounding the use of interventions with ELs has increased since 2010, it remains inadequate. Gaps in teacher knowledge of the RtI framework and language acquisition principles pose challenges to teachers as they implement RtI with primary grade ELs. English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers have the knowledge and experience to inform general education teachers of the impact of policies and procedures upon ELs. The perspectives of ESL teachers are essential to the intervention progression for ELs (Wright & Choi, 2006). The study conducted by Orosco and Klingner (2010) observed instructional practices and RtI implementation procedures in the general education classroom, however, it did not seek to obtain ESL teachers' perspectives. The current study desires to address this gap through the inclusion of ESL teachers in the participant sample. Similarly, existing research fails to study the impact of RtI with ELs in school districts with smaller EL sub-groups. According to Capps et al. (2005) EL enrollments are growing in non urban areas which have not customarily had significant EL

sub-groups. The current study was conducted in a rural school district in East Tennessee with a relatively smaller EL sub-group. Considering the contextual factors that contribute to second language acquisiton and potential special education referrals, the perspectives of teachers of ELs believed to be learning disabled in districts and schools with small EL sub-groups are germane to the topic (Hart, as cited in Dudley-Marling & Lucas, 2009).

RtI has potential to help schools address concerns about staff inexperience in the use of student data to make instructional decisions. The RtI model may also facilitate other reform efforts in schools, including the emphasis on collaboration amongst staff members, the adoption of evidence-based practices and the strategic abandonment of practices which are known not to be effective (Lipson et al., 2012).

States and districts implementing RtI models have included provisions that interventions must be administered with fidelity. Some researchers contended this provision resulted (or will result) in rigid checklists of formulaic actions not likely to improve student learning outcomes. Strict adherence to program instructions and scripts to maintain fidelity is construed by some practitioners as an attempt to limit responsible decision making by professional educators. Yet, the professional expertise necessary for responsible decision making is often deficient in schools. Educators must have a thorough understanding of the essential components of an intervention as well as a conceptual grasp of the instructional shifts needed for the intervention to be successful. Teachers and interventionists must acknowledge the importance of noticing each student's specific knowledge and skill and, at the same time, upholding the integrity of specific interventions or instructional approaches (Bollman, 2007).

Much of the literature on RtI indicates it has potential to positively impact student academic growth, as long as the model adopted is grounded in research, implemented with

fidelity, and analyzes data to guide instructional decisions. Best professional practice suggests implementing an effective RtI model requires we do what is needed by and best for every student in our school. "Education evolves around an outcome oriented establishment. As such, the usefulness of intervention or instruction is determined by its very effect on student learning and outcomes" (Burns & Gibbons, 2008, p. 30).

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a description of the methodology and design employed for this study. The researcher sought to explore teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of response to intervention (RtI) model with English Learners (ELs) in a rural school district in east Tennessee. The development of the interview instrument (Appendix D), data collection and analysis was the focus of this chapter, as was the criteria used for selecting participants and the process used for purposeful sampling of the population.

Introduction

This researcher sought to analyze teacher perceptions of the effectiveness of the response to intervention (RtI) model with English Learners (ELs) in a rural east Tennessee school district. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. The researcher conducted individual open-ended, face to face interviews to discover teacher perceptions of the effectiveness of the RtI framework with ELs. Additionally, the researcher identified teacher knowledge of the policies and procedures in place in their district regarding identification, instruction, assessment and referral procedures used with ELs.

Qualitative Design

Whereas research typically ascribes significance to inquiry through hypothesis, qualitative study allows the researcher to see situations through the participants eyes and to gain insight from the participants (Creswell, 2007). Case study research allows data to be collected for the purpose of analyzing and interpreting the phenomenon being studied. Since the researcher gathers information where the phenomenon occurs, qualitative inquiry offers a naturalistic approach to research (Creswell, 2007). Becker (as cited in Merriam, 2009, p. 210)

defined reality as: "…what we choose not to question at the moment." According to Merriam (2009), qualitative inquiry provides the researcher with an understanding of participants' experiences and their interpretation of those experiences, of their reality of those experiences. Internal validity in all research hinges on our definition of reality (Merriam).

In this study, the researcher used a case study approach employing qualitative methodology. A case study bounded by qualitative methodology allows flexibility for the researcher, while providing boundaries within which to examine participants' experiences (Santangelo, 2009). Case study is a preferred research design for examining implementation of an instructional framework such as RtI because it affords the researcher flexibility to explore any aspects of the phenomenon that arise throughout the implementation process (Santangelo, 2009). Further, case study design allows the researcher to report descriptions and identify themes and ideas related to the specific subject of the case study (Creswell, 2007). In this study, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews (Creswell, 2007). This researcher used case study approach integrating qualitative methodology to conduct this study. Merriam (2009) described qualitative inquiry as an overarching concept that overlays several forms of research. Qualitative study allows researchers to maintain the natural setting of the experiences, and therefore more completely understand and be able to explain the meaning of the experiences. A case study bounded by qualitative research methods provides an outline for the study, but allows room for the researcher to explore and analyze the participants' experiences in an authentic setting (Miles & Huberman, 2014). Experiential research focuses on phenomena within the natural setting and the meaning participants' assign to the phenomenon (Merriam, 2009). The purpose of this study was to examine the perceived effectiveness of the Response to Intervention framework with students who are acquiring English as a second language and to explore

participants' experiences with the implementation of the RtI framework. The guidelines and procedures for implementation of the framework, teacher knowledge of the framework and language acquisition process, as well as the level of training in using the framework were explored.

Creswell (2013) described case study as the study of lived experiences. Klingner and Edwards (2006) purported the use of qualitative inquiry is important to understanding the complex practices used in identifying students from linguistically diverse background as needing special education program support. The aim of qualitative inquiry is to reveal the reality of the events through the experiences of those who interact with it each day. "Qualitative researchers are intrigued with the complexity of social interactions as expressed in daily life and with the meanings the participants themselves attribute to these interactions" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 2). McMillan and Schumacher (2009) underscored the researcher must explore the phenomenon being studied thoroughly and from different angles, however, the researcher must temporarily set that understanding aside.

Research Questions

1. How do teachers perceive the RtI framework?
2. What are teacher perceptions of how RtI impacts the general education classroom?
3. What instructional practices do teachers perceive as effective for ELs?
4. How effective do teachers perceive RtI to be in advancing ELs' learning of academic content?

Ethics

Prior to beginning this study, the researcher obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of East Tennessee State University (ETSU). Permission was obtained from

both district and school level administration where the study took place. An interview protocol was used with each participant. Creswell (2007) and Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun (2012) asserted interview protocols with standardized open-ended questions ensures organization and eases data analysis because every participant responds to the same questions. This strengthens the comparability of participant responses.

ETSU provided guidelines to protect participants in research. This researcher used these guidelines to provide safeguards for participants. These safeguards were initially explained in the Letter of Recruitment (see Appendix B) and again in the Informed Consent (see Appendix C). Participants were informed that participation was voluntary and could be halted at any point without penalty. Informed consent was obtained from each participant. Participants were informed about the intended uses of the information gathered and a pseudonym was assigned to each participant to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. Participants were notified they would have the opportunity to review their interview transcript and clarify any part before the study proceeded to the next stage.

Role of the Researcher

The risk of bias exists in all components of qualitative research and can come from the questions, the respondents and the researcher. Ordering questions so one question influences the next and using leading words and questions are forms of bias (Creswell, 2007). The goal of reducing bias is to make sure questions are thoughtfully posed and delivered in a way that allows participants to reveal their true feelings without distortions.

A threat to credibility present in any qualitative study wherein the primary source of data is interviews is the researcher. Patton (2015) asserted "the human factor is…the great strength

and the fundamental weakness of qualitative inquiry and analysis—a scientific two-edged sword" (p. 433).

This researcher has served as district coordinator for federal programs, school administrator, and teacher of English learners in multiple districts and states. These experiences had the potential to bring both strengths and bias to this study. These prior experiences allowed insight into patterns of identification and practices used with ELs. Further, this researcher through professional associations could have been acquainted with a participant. Breaches of ethics can be avoided through careful selection of participants and by clearly establishing the role of the researcher with the participant early in the process. Biases and acquaintance were contained through journal notes, explicit analytic notation and member checking. Prior experiences also served as a strength because the researcher approached the study with a deep understanding of the EL population and the RtI framework. Therefore, less participant time was needed to clairify and explain processes. Participant time was maximized to allow the researacher to develop a deeper understanding of teacher perceptions of the effectiveness of the RtI framework with ELs.

A coding system was employed to keep the identity of participants private and pseudonyms were used to ensure confidentiality of district and schools participating the study. The questions were field tested with teachers in another school to refine the wording, eliminate closed or leading questions, and ensure the relevance of each question.

Selection Criteria and Sample

The sample included four general education teachers, four English as a Second Language teachers, and two Response to Intervention specialists at three schools. All participant schools are located in a single school district in East Tennessee. Site selection was employed to ensure

the district and schools selected to participate had English Learners enrolled and were implementing RtI. Site selection is used when "the research focus is on complex microprocesses" (MacMillan & Schumacher, p. 318). In this study, it was essential that participants have knowledge about RtI and its use with English Learners. Therefore, participants were selected purposefully for this study. McMillan and Schumacher (2009) explain that purposeful sampling is used by researchers to choose participants that will represent the population or have knowledge about the topic being studied. The population was limited to a small number of general education teachers, ESL teachers, and RtI specialists in a school district with an EL population of approximately 6% of the total student population. Smith et al. (2009) supported the homogeneity of participants to ensure that all have access to and can provide detailed insight into a specific experience. Interpretative phenomenological research focuses on a small, homogenous sample because of the complexity of the experiences (Smith et al., 2009).

Snowballing was employed in schools where the researcher was not familiar with which general education teachers had English Learners in their classrooms. MacMillan and Schumacher (2006) described this sampling strategy as useful in studies wherein the researcher receives suggestions for additional participants from participants themselves. Recommendations from the school district's program supervisors were solicited to identify a pool of prospective ESL and RtI participants for this study. These teachers were interviewed and asked to provide the names of additional teachers at that school who have English learners in their general education classroom and have knowledge about the use of the RtI problem solving framework with English learners.

This study involved a sample of ten participants who met the criteria. This allowed a focused and detailed analysis of teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of the RtI framework

with ELs, based on experiences. This sample size allowed the researcher to demonstrate that enough data has been collected to reasonably ensure that no new phenomenon would occur, that nothing had been missed, and that the peak of the data had been reached and the point of data saturation had been met (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). Data saturation is a point at which each additional data point yields diminished return to the relevance of the study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006).

Data Collection

The county director of schools was asked for written permission to conduct the study at the three identified schools within the school system. Participants in the study were provided informed consent as required by ETSU.

Teachers at a non-participant school were used to field test the interview protocol. Four teachers were asked to participate in this process. During this process, the researcher transcribed participant responses to determine how to record and compare data. Interview questions were added, deleted, changed and re-ordered to ensure the most effective and efficient instrument was used.

Initial contact was made through e-mail with a follow-up telephone contact. A consent form was explained to and signed by each participant to document the consent of each participant prior to beginning each interview. Data collection procedures included semi-structured, open-ended, individual face-to-face interviews with participants. Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes and took place at a location chosen by the participant.

Interviews were recorded and transcribed. MacMillan and Schumacher (2010) asserted that audio recording the interviews provides information to confirm reliability and ensures the entirety of the conversation (p. 360). Transcripts of the interviews were reviewed and then presented to participants to check for accuracy. Member checking of completed transcripts

ensures higher levels of accuracy (Creswell, 2007). Maxwell (2012) described member checks as the most important way to rule out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what a participant said. After each had been member checked, transcripts of participant responses were reviewed and coded by research question concepts and then analyzed for parallels and differences.

Interviews

An in-depth interview method of inquiry was used. An interview guide was used with each participant to ensure consistency and uniformity of each interview. Open-ended questions were included in the interview protocol (Appendix D). These questions were aligned with the research questions for this study. The questions were open ended to allow participants to discuss their professional and (occasionally) personal experiences concerning their perceptions of the effectiveness of the RtI framework with English learners. Seidman (2013) asserted that interview questions most frequently spring from participants' responses to previous questions.

All interviews were face to face audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. The purpose for each interview was to allow teacher participants to share their perceptions of the effectiveness of, and experiences with the RtI framework when used with ELs, in a neutral setting with no threat of judgment (Creswell, 2008).

Data Management

All participants to the current study were assigned pseudonyms to protect their identify and maintain anonymity. Any information which could potentially allow a participant to be identified was maintained separately from the interview data and journal notes for the study. All data were kept in a locked cabinet in the researcher's home office. Only the researcher had access to the data. The transcripts of interviews were organized in protected electronic files.

Names of participants were replaced with pseudonyms to protect their privacy. Codes were developed relative to the research questions and individual transcripts of interviews were categorized according to these codes. Codes were organized and analyzed to detect themes. Data were organized using spreadsheet software. Where necessary, physical documentation was maintained in labeled notebooks, organized by research questions, themes, and participant pseudonym.

Data sources

Three data sources were used. The participant interview provided data which was transcribed exactly as stated. A second source of data resulted from the member check of the transcription of the interview. A third source of data arose from a review of unsolicited documents which some participants spontaneously produced during the interview.

Instrumentation

Patton (2002) stated, "In qualitative inquiry, the researcher is the instrument" (p. 14). "In qualitative research the researcher as instrument is an accepted and acceptable stance. It is imperative that the qualitative researcher be fully aware of how his/her ontological and epistemological position underpins the research" (Xu & Storr, 2012, p. 306).

In the process of conducting interviews, collecting observation and field notes, the researcher as instrument can develop skills that will enhance the depth and quality of the data generated (Xu & Storr, 2012). Rubin and Rubin (2005) averred that "Interviews are not simple conversations. Instead, the interviewer must develop the art of hearing data." Nunkoosing supported this by adding the importance of "develop[ing] the use of self in relationship building to communicate with people to create stories" (Nunkoosing, 2005, p. 698).

This researcher has worked in public education in several states, settings, grade levels, and capacities for more than twenty years, teaching middle school, acting as school administrator, district level facilitator and county supervisor. These opportunities have afforded the researcher experiences that are conducive to having purposeful conversations with participants (Dexter, 1970). Xu and Storr (2012) highlight the personal and experiential background of the researcher by stating "… quality of data is dependent on the ability of the interviewer to attend to the flow of conversations by using effective interviewing skills such as probes, silence, and follow-up questions (Xu & Storr, 2012).

This researcher conducted semi-structured face-to-face interviews with all participants. These interviews were comprised of open-ended questions and lasted approximately 85 minutes. Significant time was spent to ensure the questions were worded so they were not leading or misleading, but allowed the researcher to obtain the desired information. "A qualitative interview can be deepened through thoughtful, focused, and distinct questions" (Patton, 2002, p. 360). A protocol/matrix for interviewing participants was developed prior to and implemented during the interviews. The protocols/matrices was used to guide the interview process, ensure consistency of questioning, and record responses to questions. A protocol was used to "ensure that the same basic lines of inquiry are pursued with each person interviewed" (Patton, 2002, p. 343). The use of a protocol facilitates organization and analysis of interview data since all participants are asked the same questions. The responses, then, can be compared (Creswell, 2007). Patton (2002) asserted that a researcher increases credibility when multiple sources of data were used. Responses from participants were separated based upon the type of teacher interviewed. Interviews from each of the categories of teachers were analyzed, compared and coded to identify concepts related to research questions. A review of unsolicited documentation

further corroborated participant responses. Member checking and triangulation were employed to strengthen the credibility and transferability of this study.

Data Analysis

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) asserted that qualitative data analysis is an inductive process in which data is organized into categories and patterns and relationships amongst the categories are identified. According to Creswell (2007) qualitative data analysis occurs at all phases of the investigative process: organizing the data, managing and coding the data, categorizing codes to identify themes, and reporting the data.

Analysis is a continuous process that occurs throughout a study. It occurs during and after data has been collected (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006, p. 367). Interview data were examined and conclusions were adjusted throughout the process. Glesne (1999) stated,

> Analysis does not refer to a stage…it is a continuing process that should begin just as soon as your research begins. It follows, then, that interviewing is not simply devoted to data acquisition. It is also a time to consider relationships, salience, meanings, and explanations – analytic acts that not only lead to new questions, but also prepare you for the more concentrated period of analysis that follows the completion of the data collection (p. 84).

Audiotaped interviews were transcribed by the researcher which facilitated the coding, categorization, and analysis of the data. Qualitative coding relies on retaining and recalling the data to learn from the data as patterns and explanations begin to emerge (Creswell, 2012; Patton 2012).

The researcher transcribed each recorded interview verbatim. The analysis began at this point. Each response was coded and recurring themes were detected. Transcripts were compared by teacher category to discover similarities and differences. Transcripts were provided to participants for member checking and additional information gleaned from member checking was recorded and transcribed for analysis. Additionally, unsolicited documentation

was reviewed and analyzed. These additional note corroborated initial interview transcript and added to the data set.

The data sources for this study include transcripts of interviews from a variety of teachers: general education teachers, ESL teachers, RtI specialists. These data were triangulated. Responses from teachers were compared amongst categories to ensure credibility and detect emergent themes.

Credibility and ethical practice was enhanced through the use of mechanical recording data, member checking and participant review (MacMillan & Schumacher, 2009). Each participant was asked for permission to record interviews, which were transcribed. Transcripts of interviewee's responses were provided to the participant for review.

Integrating Summary

With the reauthorization of IDEA in 2011 and the evolution in thinking about learning disabilities came a shift in thinking about eligibility and identification criteria. The reauthorization gave states the option to identify students as having learning disabilities using models other than the previous IQ discrepancy formula. Accordingly, many states have adopted the RtI framework, in which universal screeners are administered to all students. Tiered interventions are prescribed to students who show signs of academic struggle, and student response to the intervention is measured and monitored. This reauthorization, referred to as Race to the Top (RttT) called upon schools to ensure every child receive quality instruction and the unique needs of every student, including students with limited English proficiency be addressed.

Unlike the IQ discrepancy model, the RtI framework presumes that a child is learning disabled if he does not respond to instruction or intervention (Gilbert et al., 2012). This qualitative study used multiple source interviews to discover teacher perceptions of the

effectiveness of the RtI framework when used with students who are acquiring English as an additional language. This study also attempted to show a lack of understanding of the RtI framework and language acquisition pedagogy by general education teachers may result in disproportionate identification of English Learners who are learning disabled. District and school leaders and teachers must become knowledgeable about the subtle, underlying factors that impact students' learning opportunities in the general education classroom. Similarly, they must become adept in the referral process to effectively reduce the disproportionate representation of linguistically diverse students in special education programs (Dandridge, Edwards & Pleasants, 2000). The data analyzed included transcripts of interviews and member check discussion, and unsolicited documentation review. Data triangulation was employed to ensure credibility of participant responses.

Conclusion

This researcher used qualitative methodology employing case study technique to study teachers' perception of the effectiveness of the RtI framework with ELs. The focus of this study was to understand whether the application of the framework to students from linguistically diverse backgrounds allows teachers to ascertain whether their challenges in learning result from language acquisition issues or learning disabilities. Qualitative data were collected from multiple sources, including teachers assigned to three different categories and unsolicited documenation. Member checking was used to ensure credibility amongst participants.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

Introduction

Response to Intervention is promoted as a promising practice to provide early intervention support for ELs, precluding the need to label students as learning disabled (Ortiz et al., 2006). The body of knowledge surrounding the effectiveness of the RtI framework with ELs is limited. Much of the extant research addresses specific interventions or studies in which the intervention is administered by the researcher and not in an authentic setting. Consequently, practitioners have little knowledge about how instructional decisions concerning ELs are made within the RtI context.

This researcher conducted a qualitative study using a case study approach (Santangelo, 2009) to examine ten teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of the Response to Intervention (RtI) framework with students who are acquiring English as a second language. Kvale and Brinkman (2009) suggested that understanding practitioners' perceptions is important because reality is what those involved perceive it to be. The purpose of the current study was to examine the perceived effectiveness of the Response to Intervention framework with students who are acquiring English as a second language and to provide information to improve the practice of educators working with ELs. The themes which emerged from the data are described in this section and supported by direct quotations of the participants. Findings were construed from these themes within the context of the existing literature. The current study sought to address the following research questions:

1. How do teachers perceive the RtI framework?
2. How do teachers perceive RtI impacts the general education classroom?

3. What instructional practices do teachers perceive as effective for ELs?
4. How effective do teachers perceive RtI to be in advancing ELs' learning of academic content?

Case Profile

The current study was conducted in a small/medium sized rural school district in East Tennessee. Ten elementary school teachers of English learners in grade kindergarten through five serving in one of three capacities, participated in a semi-structured, open-ended, face-to-face interview session and provided insight into their perceptions of the implementation of the RtI framework with ELs. Participants were given pseudonyms to protect their identity. Individual interview sessions lasted between 75-105 minutes, during which participants shared their understanding of the RtI protocol, their perceptions of the framework, and their knowledge of effective instructional practices with English learners. During the interview, teacher participants also disclosed their personal experiences with referring English learners for evaluation for Special Education services as well as their experiences as a member of a collaborative grade level data team. Teacher participants were asked to share their knowledge of the policies and procedures in place in their district regarding the identification, instruction, assessment and referral procedures used with English learners. Transcripts of teacher interviews were used to gather data to address the research questions. Member checking provided an opportunity for teachers to verify they were understood and to clarify responses as needed.

Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2014) described codes as labels used to give levels of meaning to the descriptive or inferred information gathered during a qualitative study. After all interviews were completed and transcribed each transcript was read twice. Responses were analyzed, coded, and compared by teacher categories (see Table 1). This ensured credibility to

the findings as the data was triangulated amongst and between teacher assignment. This researcher looked for themes, phrases, words and concepts that recurred through the transcripts.

These teachers' participation evidenced their desire to provide constructive information for the benefit of other educators, but they were reminded the data collected were relevant to this study only.

Participant Profiles

Table 1

Profiles of Teacher Participants

Teacher	Teacher Category	Years Experience	Grade Range Assigned
One	General Education	≤ 2	Middle elementary
Two	General Education	10-19	Upper elementary
Three	ESL	20-29	K – 6
Four	RtI Intervention	20-29	K – 6
Five	General Education	5-8	Primary
Six	General Education	≥30	Primary
Seven	RtI Intervention	2-4	K – 6
Eight	ESL	10-19	K – 6
Nine	ESL	5-8	K – 6
Ten	ESL	2-4	K – 6

The risk of identification of participants was increased because of the small sample size. Number of years' experience were stated in ranges rather than specific number of years to ensure the anonymity of participants.

Several themes emerged from the inductive data analysis of the interview audio recordings regarding the participants' perceived level of effectiveness of the RtI framework with English learners in a small/medium sized rural district in east Tennessee. Themes included

knowledge and purpose of the framework, training and professional development, language acquisition characteristics vs. learning disability characteristics, and leadership.

Interview Data Analysis

Research Question 1: *How do teachers perceive the RtI framework?*

This question focused on how elementary school teachers perceive the RtI framework. This question was intentionally broad to elicit overarching impressions and opinions and to allow participants to provide details to support their initial statements.

Theme 1: Knowledge and Purpose

When asked how teachers perceive the RtI framework every teacher responded in a manner consistent with others in their category. All four classroom teachers responded they were glad to have time in the day dedicated to small group instruction based on students' needs. Three of the four classroom teachers made statements that indicated the belief that the success of RtI was dependent on a specific program and specific time.

Teacher One responded:

> It's nice to have time set aside during the day to meet with students in small groups so we can target their specific needs. There are some things I really like about (a specific program), but I don't think it allows us to see the specific skills the students are weakest in and find things to help build that skill. (Specific program), that we used last year worked better with some students.

Teacher Two responded:

> I like that we have time with kids who are struggling, and the other students are in another classroom, so there are less distractions. I can really concentrate on these 5 students. I think it's great that our whole school is going to RtI at the same time, the Tier 1s, the Tier 2, the Tier 3s. Also, we're all using the same program and I think it's good for the kids to hear the same language and everyone is tapping and blending throughout the school. We're able to use that in whole group, too. It helps students who aren't as fluent in reading—they have some tools.

Teacher Five responded:

> It's good that we are all doing RtI at the same time. We have our groups and then students come back for whole group and we can reinforce what they learned. I think (specific program) works pretty well for students who are struggling with decoding, but I don't think it helps students who are struggling with comprehension or just need to build vocabulary. I think those kids, especially, get really bored. And, I think it can really help students who are learning English…to learn sounds of the alphabet…and to help them blend those sounds…but that's really the same for any student who is not making progress in Reading.

Teacher Six responded in a manner that indicated he/she did not believe the RtI framework was dependent upon a specific program.

> RtI is really just what we've done all along—once our student population really started to struggle. It's differentiating what students need and giving them instruction in those skills in small groups—we can really target it there. I'm glad we have dedicated time for it now, but if we didn't, we'd still have to individualize for students who are struggling. But now it's easier to do that and I think they like it better because it's not so obvious who is in the low group and who is in the high group. Everyone goes to a different group. I like that we're all using (specific program) and I like that we're all doing it at the same time. It makes it easier for us, and I think it's more structured for students…, but we'd find something else...or make our own...if we didn't use (specific program). We know our kids. Sometimes the (progress monitoring measure) says one thing when we know that's not the whole story. It shouldn't depend on one test….and RtI makes the process longer. We know our students and that's not part of the story.

The four ESL teachers were unified in their understanding of the purpose of RtI. The all stated that the purpose of RtI was to provide small group instruction for students who were struggling to learn to read, especially decoding. One ESL teacher added: "…or in math." They each described the process and procedures, and in one case programs, used in their schools for students "in tiers." Each of the teachers also made statements about RtI as a pre-referral intervention. Teacher Eight commented:

> I see the real value of RtI in being a way to prevent English learners from being referred for special education too quickly. The framework is designed so that many different interventions are provided before teachers can say this child has a learning disability. There have been a couple times, though, where I think we might have delayed too long in referring a child. Still, it's better to be cautious and try to find out exactly what the child needs. Sometimes they just need time.

Teacher Nine, however, elaborated:

> RtI is great. I love that teachers are required to set aside time for students who are struggling to learn to read. I don't like it though, because now, teachers think that my time with ELs is RtI time. If students come to their class and they are non-English speaking, they think that they automatically go to Tier 3, and they think any of 'my students' should be in a Tier 3 group. It frustrates me because I don't think they understand they (non-English speaking ELs) really can't benefit from intervention this early. I don't think, maybe, that Tier 3 would hurt them, but it can't be in place of ESL. Some teachers want one or the other – they don't want them pulled out of class, but then they don't differentiate for them, I don't know, maybe they don't really know how to. It's just frustrating. Because then I don't really know why they don't know how to differentiate. I offer to help, I make suggestions, I push-in to class…I'm not sure RtI has helped ELs in that way. But, I think it has helped. Teachers can't refer them [ELs] for Special Education so quickly, as they did or tried to in the past.

The RtI teachers stated the purpose of the RtI framework is to provide targeted support to students who struggle with foundational skills in reading or math.

Teacher Four added:

> The support can't end after 45 or 60 minutes. These kids struggle all day long. Tier 3 kids are Tier 3 kids in reading, math, science, social studies. With some teachers, I think RtI is helping them to see how important small group targeted instruction is in the classroom. With others, though, I don't see it. I think they feel like we should 'fix it' and the kids will come back to them able to read on grade level.

Teacher Seven responded:

> I definitely get the feeling that teachers…some teachers…feel like RtI is just a series of hoops to jump through in order to refer a child for Special Education evaluation. Sometimes I'll hear comments like that in our data team meetings. "How many more data points do we need? How many weeks will that take? Can I start filling out the paperwork now?" Our admin. stops that and asks questions, like, "What interventions have you tried? How has the student responded? What else will you try? Why?" I hear some comments that they are trying to stall, but teachers don't understand the concept of intervention and monitoring progress.

Theme 2: Leadership

A theme that emerged from interviews with teachers was the concept of Leadership. Teacher participants discussed both school level leadership and district leadership. Most

teachers felt that leaders in the building were supportive of RtI, and strived to do what was best for students in their school. Teacher 2 commented:

> They are flexible. If the limit is five students in a group, but we need to add one more to a Tier, to make sure he gets what he needs, they'll let us do that.

Several teachers expressed concern that mandated fidelity checks and other paperwork, requirements and limitations. Teacher 2 commented:

> Sometimes it feels like it's just a big check list. If they can check it off, it's okay. They forget there's a person, a little person, who this affects. I get frustrated and I see others get frustrated, sometimes, at our RtI data meetings. Things don't have to work the same way at every school. We have to be able to do what works for us, for our students.

Research Question 2: *How do teachers perceive RtI impacts the general education classroom?*

This question sought to understand the degree to which teachers understand the intended impact of the RtI framework upon the instruction cycle including teaching, assessing, and monitoring student progress.

Theme 1: Knowledge and Purpose: When asked how RtI has impacted the general education classroom, teacher participants responded:

Teacher Six:

> Honestly, it's what a good teacher did anyway…before RtI. We found out what the kids needed, where they were, and then we would pull them in small groups to us and cover more basic skills they needed. If they don't have the basics, they can't move on.

Teacher Four:

> I think it's helping teachers to be more aware of what students need…I mean individually. It's helped me to think about it from that perspective. But, I see some teachers who just won't, well, they just think they can send them to us and we'll 'fix them.' Then when they go back to class, they aren't struggling anymore and they can keep up with the rest of the class. But, I think it's getting better. Also, teachers a lot of times think that progress monitoring is just checking off boxes so the student can be evaluated for Sp. Ed. If a child moves from below the $10^{\%}$ ile to right below the 25% ile in a year, that's pretty significant. The data points each time may not look like they are making much progress, but slow and steady progress will show up over time. That's why

> we have to be willing to give it some time and not rush into decisions…try different things and see how the student responds.

Theme 2: Leadership

Teacher Four:

> I hear more talk now about how to differentiate. Our district and our school have focused a lot on that. Some teachers aren't understanding that even though they teach third grade, they may have to unpack a standard in small group for certain kids and scaffold, but I think there are fewer of those teachers. Our principals stress this. They make teachers support decisions to move students amongst tiers…but more, they make us explain what we've done in the classroom. RtI can affect every child, but I think it depends a lot on how our principals and supervisors deal with it. Is it a checklist and a ten minute visit or is it a personal interest in each child and thinking outside the box for that student…?

Teacher Eight:

> I've worked with previous administrators that didn't understand English learners and they always wanted to put them in tiers, and then get them to special ed. if they weren't making progress by the second year. Having district ELL Supervisor and building principals that understand, or at least want to understand, ELs make a big difference.

Teacher Eight provided an example of a specific fourth grade student who had newly arrived in the United States with no formal education in his native language. Six months into his time, his classroom teacher referred him for special education consideration. Teacher Eight discussed the conversations their school administration facilitated, in many instances to the frustration of the grade level teacher. Teacher Eight explained that 18 months later, this same student is making progress in every content area, and is charming and engaging in his social interactions. "He is in no way fluent in English, but he is well on his way. It would have been a travesty to label this child as learning disabled." Our principals prevented this, but did it in a way that we can all look back now and feel that we were part of the right decision.

Theme 3: Training & Professional Development

Theme 4: Language Acquisition vs. Learning Disability

None of the teachers interviewed felt that their training or professional development around RtI was adequate. In every case, a reference was made to needing more training in the principles of RtI and/or second language acquisition. The two themes: Training and Professional Development and Language Acquisition vs. Learning Disability merged throughout these responses. The participant responses indicate the connection between the two themes. Teacher One elaborated:

> I feel like I know what needs to be done to stay out of trouble…I mean to be doing what I should be doing, but I don't really know what the purpose is. I mean I do…it's to help students who are struggling, and really target their needs. Our principals talk about that with us during our RtI meetings, but then, we have these limits…you can only have three students who need Tier 3… Well, 'hello,' we have a few more than that….so, now what do we do? It doesn't work on the checklist. I feel like our training has all been about the checklist…the procedures. Plus, I worry about the students who are on grade level, and even those above grade level.

Teacher Ten shared feelings about the training/professional development they have received:

> We received training on the procedures for RtI, and I think that made us all kind of comfortable to begin with. As we got to know more about RtI, though, and sat in the data team meetings, it kept coming up that 'Was this a language thing or a learning disability?' The training we had never really talked about that…just about how to progress monitor kids and 'quote' change the intervention if they weren't making progress. It didn't talk about ELL kids in tiers and how to help us figure out if it was language or disability. I'm not happy with the answer 'RtI won't help them until they reach a certain level [of English proficiency].' The training needs to specifically talk about English learners and the process of learning a new language, especially when they weren't completely fluent in their first language.

Teacher Seven discussed his/her lack of confidence in addressing the needs of students with limited English proficiency through RtI:

> We received very thorough training on the specific programs we need to use for Tier II and Tier III, and I felt really good about starting. When we started to talk about students in our data team meetings, though, as the ESL teachers would question whether it was a language difference or learning issue, I realized I just didn't know. Then it made me really question whether the whole idea of a specific learning disability…I don't know, to me, that's big, to say a student has a learning disability…he may just be a slower learner.

Research Question 3: What instructional practices do teachers perceive as effective for ELs?

This research question sought to understand teachers' understanding of instructional strategies that were specifically effective with students whose English proficiency was developing. Theme Three: Training & Professional Development and Theme Four: Language Acquisition vs. Learning Disability merged throughout participant responses to questions related to ideas.

Theme Three: Training & Professional Development

Teacher Seven expressed concern over providing intervention for students who are acquiring English as a new language.

> Sometimes I don't think they are learning during intervention because they can't understand me or the other children. It is helping them with English, to hear the sounds and letters, but I don't really feel like I know what I'm doing with them. They get frustrated or just sit and smile. I wonder if I'm helping or making them more confused. I wish I knew more about ESL. Our teachers here are great, and they gave us some information. They did a break out session during our mini-conference. It was good, but I have a lot more questions.

Teacher Five responded:

> I don't feel real confident in knowing what my Spanish speaking kids need or what helps them. Our ESL teacher is great. He will suggest somethings and I try them and sometimes they work. When they don't work, though, I feel like I'm pestering him. He says, "Be patient, and keep trying this or that." Sometimes, though, I feel like I'm making it too simple. Are they really learning? And, I always wonder what's more important, understanding the content or learning the language.

When asked about knowledge of policies or procedures that would dictate instruction of English Learners, Teacher Six responded:

> Well, I know we have to give them certain modifications and accommodations, but, well, I don't really know more than that.

Theme Four: Language Acquisition vs. Learning Disability

Teacher Five talked about the frustration of not knowing whether a student was having trouble learning or just did not understand, in response to a question about the RtI framework as it pertains to English learners:

> It would help us so much if we knew if the students had a learning disability or if they just did not understand English. The benchmark assessments we give them really aren't fair. How can they be fluent in or understand something that is written or spoken in a different language. I wouldn't benchmark if I were in Spanish. Why can't we test them in Spanish? Then we would know how to tell if it's language or learning. I just can't tell sometimes.

When asked about practices they perceived as effective with ELs Teacher Two responded:

> Good teaching is good teaching. I use all the strategies that are effective for students who are below grade level. I put them in small groups with other struggling students, I make them answer less questions. I let them use a dictionary. If there is another student that can translate for them, I put them next to that student.
> Our district does a really good job of targeting professional development for what we need. Since our EL population is growing, we probably need some more information about what work with them.

Teacher Three responded by naming several strategies she suggests classroom teachers use with ELs.

> Some of these are things that will work with any struggling student. But there are several that are really helpful with ELs: modeling, use of realia, and cognates. Oh, and labeling…I label everything in my room in English and Spanish. I always offer to make copies of my labels for classroom teachers. Some take me up on it, some don't.
> I taught ESL in another state before moving here. In that school district, our lesson plans had to contain language objectives for every content. That would be something good to start here. It would help teachers understand that it's not content or language. Students can develop their language fluency using the content as the medium. When I say something like that, though, I kind of get blank looks back. ELs are not a big part of our student population across the district. Some schools have a lot, other schools have none. The numbers are growing though, steadily. I don't know if we've fully grasped the importance of meeting their needs. I know we all want to, but haven't figure out yet, how to.

Research Question 4: How effective do teachers perceive RtI to be in advancing ELs' learning of academic content?

This question sought to understand teachers' perception of the effectiveness of the RtI framework in developing EL's mastery of academic content while building their proficiency in English.

Theme One: Knowledge & Purpose

When asked what strategies they used to support or assessments they used to monitor the progress of ELs, especially those who are appear to be struggling, Teacher One responded:

> Oh my gosh, I don't really know. Can I say that? Is it okay to say that? I pull them with me in a small group with the lower students. We work on basic reading skills. I also let them use [a computer program] they can listen to. I have a para-pro that comes in for my Special Ed. Students and I group [two students] with them. They get pulled out for ESL. I wanted them to go to RtI Tier III, but we can't because…well, anyway, that's not a space for them.

Teacher Two responded:

> Our [specific name of intervention time] has allowed me to spend time with students who are struggling in small, very small, groups. My Spanish speaking students get pulled at the same time for ESL. But the good thing is, really, that when I do centers and pull small groups during Tier I time, whether it's reading, math, science or social studies, I know what these guys need. Sometimes I group them with low learners, especially for reading. Sometimes, though, I group them with my middle learners, for science and social studies. Math, for math, I try to see where they are and group them based on that. RtI doesn't help directly with content standards, but it helps them build content language and basic concepts and we can build from there.

Teacher Three responded:

> We can't wait for students to become proficient in English and then bombard them with content. It takes 5-7 years to become academically proficient in English or another language. They can learn a lot in that time. We have to make sure they can access the content though. RtI can help with that. Math intervention reteaches and pre-teaches math vocabulary, but at a conceptual level. Some of the reading intervention groups are focused on academic vocabulary and helping students with strategies to decode and figure out meaning. That way, when students go to math or science, they have some prior knowledge of what they are talking about.

Theme Two: Leadership

When asked to share their perceptions of assessment practices with ELs, several teachers responded with concerns about assessment practices. The theme of Leadership was arose in every teacher's response. In some cases, the teachers referred to building and district leadership. In other cases, participants denoted state leadership when discussing their views and insights on assessment practices with ELs.

Teacher Three responded:

> Our building administrators are knowledgeable about ELs, and they make sure we are included in conversations about assessment for them. They also make sure that teachers understand that it's not all about the state test. At our last faculty meeting, when we were discussing accommodations for ELs, they told us not to limit classroom accommodations for a child just because it wasn't allowed on the state test. If a child can't read the story, then allow him to have it read aloud. Build up to him reading it himself, of course. This was the part that really stuck with me, "If they can't read it, and read aloud is not an allowable accommodation, then they won't do any better on the test because you didn't read it to them in class." I was glad to hear that said out loud.

Teacher Nine responded:

> I get frustrated by...the State who expect students who have only been speaking English a little over a year to take a test in English. The results are just not valid. Of course they aren't proficient. What are they really measuring…content knowledge? Then test them in their native language.

Teacher Six responded:

> The benchmark assessments and progress monitoring assessments don't really tell us a lot about fluency and comprehension. If we could read it aloud or test their fluency in Spanish, that might be more meaningful. And then, if we refer them for Special Ed. assessment, those tests are done in English, too. We have to rule out language as a factor, but we really can't.

Theme 3: Training & Professional Development

Theme 4: Language Acquisition vs. Learning Disability

These theme emerged concomitantly in many participant responses about assessment and evaluation practices for ELs. The RtI teachers interviewed expressed a desire for more

information and professional development in distinguishing between a learning disability and the language acquisition process. Three of the four ESL teachers interviewed similarly expressed their need for more information about RtI.

Teacher Ten responded:

> I am not sure that labelling a student as having a learning disability through the RtI process is appropriate. I mean, I didn't think the other way was appropriate either, but it doesn't seem like this is as reliable. It's one thing to say that a student struggles, but to say they are learning disabled. I don't know. Maybe I just need more information on the RtI process, and particularly for my kids.

When asked about their perceptions of the level of effectiveness of the RtI framework in Addressing the needs of struggling ELs, every teacher responded they had some reservations about the use of the RtI framework to meet the needs of ELs.

Teacher One responded:

> This is still new to me. But I wish we had a way of knowing whether they were struggling because they didn't understand the language or they weren't processing the information, or if they are just learning at a slower pace. If it's language, then ESL support and being around their grade level peers more would help.

Teacher Ten responded:

> I believe it has the potential to, but I don't think we're there yet. I think we need to make sure we don't stick to a check list, and look at each student—especially ELs—individually. Some of our kids are ELs, but come from homes where the parents aren't literate in Spanish either. Some of these kids don't even really speak Spanish, except for simple conversations with their parents. We need to be able to look at all of that. And, the goal shouldn't be to label them as learning disabled.

Teacher Four responded:

> RtI is a great improvement over the old way of identifying students who need Special Education support. I think it forces us to intervene earlier and more targeted and monitor students' progress in specific areas to get them up to speed. I've been in education for a long time, and there's no magic wand. The RtI framework, I think, keeps us from referring ELs too soon, but I have a lot of concerns about what "non-response to intervention" looks like in students who don't speak English.

Documents Review

Several of the teacher participants voluntarily provided documents regarding their own professional development and training and school and district procedures for RtI. Documents outlining state mandates concerning ELs were also provided. These documents were unsolicited, but were reviewed to support information provided by teachers regarding their experiences and knowledge. The researcher applied the same coding system to the document evidence as was applied to the interview data.

Research Question 1: *How do teachers perceive the RtI framework?*

Theme 1: Knowledge & Purpose

Theme 3: Training & Professional Development

Three teachers provided documentation of training in the Response to Intervention framework. Statements from the power point outlines of training sessions are reflected below:

Document 1. *Training on Response to Intervention framework*

(2 hours) (provided only to RtI intervention teachers.)

I. Universal Screener
   a. Benchmark assessment
   b. [specific assessment program]
   c. Dates

II. Progress Monitoring
   a. [specific program]
   b. Tier II
      i. Frequency
      ii. Who is responsible
   c. Tier III
      i. Frequency
      ii. Who is responsible

III. Fidelity Monitoring
   a. Fidelity checks
      i. Number of students
      ii. Length of time
      iii. Frequency

iv. Number of fidelity checks
    1. Tier II
    2. Tier III

Document 2. *Training on RtI with ELs provided at state conference*

Teacher's notes on handout provided at session (45 minutes)

Notation 1. A general guideline is that ELs who are below a Level 3 English proficiency won't really benefit from intervention yet.

Notation 2. Rely on ESL teachers' expertise and experience. If they think something else is going on with S…don't wait to refer.

Notation 3. Must eliminate language/culture/attendance/poverty as a factor ??????

Document 3. *Training provided by ESL teachers during mini-conference* (1.5 hours)

I. Principles of Language Acquisition
II. Receptive & Expressive Language
III. L1 and L2
    a. Processing a second language
        i. Code switching
VII. Strategies to use with ELs
    A list of strategies were included during the presentation.

Document 4. *Training on the use of [specific assessment program]* (2.5 hours)

I. Sign on
II. Set up your group
    Note: make sure only students in Tiers are in [specific online program]
III. Enter scores
IV. Reports

Four themes developed from the inductive analysis of data collected from interview transcripts regarding teachers' perception of the effectiveness of the RtI framework with English learners. Themes included knowledge and perceived purpose of the framework, impact of leadership in implementing the framework and supporting ELs, training and professional

development concerning teaching ELs and responding to students' academic needs, and understanding the language acquisition process and discerning indicators of learning disability. Documents were voluntarily provided by some participants. These documents provided additional information to support statements made by participants. Information from this chapter was used to formulate implications and support suggestions for future research presented in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine the perceived effectiveness of the Response to Intervention framework with students who are acquiring English as a second language. Specifically, the current study sought to understand teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of the framework when implemented with students from linguistically diverse backgrounds who are learning to read, write, speak and aurally understand English. Four research questions guided this qualitative case study. Purposeful sampling was used to identify participants who could provide rich information related to the topic of the study. Using an interview guide, an open-ended interview of each participant was conducted to discuss the topic with teacher participants from three school in one district. Qualitative research methods were applied. Data were triangulated and member checking was employed to increase credibility. Responses from elementary classroom teachers were compared and cross checked with those provided by ESL teachers and RtI teachers to ensure dependability.

This study was designed with the belief that teachers' perceptions can help other educators acquire knowledge and skills to support the linguistic and academic needs of ELs in the classroom. Additionally, this study sought to understand teachers' understanding of RtI as a pre-referral process for identifying ELs with learning disability. The literature suggests that ESL teachers have been excluded from research on the effectiveness of the RtI framework with ELs. Nonetheless, ascertaining whether ELs struggle as a result of learning disability has continued to exist as a problem for educators (Rinaldi & Samson, 2008). An in-depth phenomenological case

study was used to allow teachers to describe their experiences, perspectives and make recommendations for improving academic outcomes for ELs.

The most concerning evidence that developed as a result of the current study is the data that revealed that students were often precluded from intervention because of lack of English language. Two of the ESL teachers and two classroom teachers expressed frustration that lack of access to intervention resulted in an EL students not having necessary 'data points' to refer for evaluation. One teacher referred to this as a Mobius strip and 'you end up chasing your tail.'

Perceptions of the RtI framework

The first research question sought to understand teachers' overarching perceptions of the degree to which the RtI framework was effectively implemented. Based on open-ended interview responses, one upper elementary grade general education classroom teacher participant questioned the effectiveness of the RtI model with all students and cited an example of a student with whom they did not believe RtI had been effective.

Primary grade teachers stated that implementing the RtI framework had positively impacted their professional practice as well as their students' learning. One of the primary teachers, Teacher Six, spoke about how RtI provides students dedicated time to receive highly individualized instruction and practice in a small group, non-threatening environment. "It is easier to meet their needs because I can focus on just them. I differentiate instruction in whole group, but I know that the low students feel pressure because other kids can answer questions they need time to think about. RtI gives me time with them, away from other students, to drill down and try to find where their difficulties begin and build up from there."

Middle grade elementary teachers also felt that overall, RtI had increased student learning because it allowed them to focus on specific deficit skills. A third-grade teacher related a brief

story of how one of her students who was struggling with foundational reading skills would not even attempt to sound out words when working at the teacher led center during core instruction. "But, when he was in [intervention], he would hold his hand up and say, 'Wait, wait, wait. I can do it' if anyone tried to help him pronounce a word." This teacher also stated that students benefit from individual conferencing to discuss progress and set goals. "It's important for students to see they are making progress, even if they know they are still one of the lower students in their class."

ESL teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of RtI were similar in content and theme. ESL Teachers felt RtI is "Very beneficial, but sometimes added extra 'hoops to jump through' when we know that there is something else going on besides language." One of the teachers re-stated the belief that it cannot be used as a substitute for ESL instruction.

RtI teachers' expressed their perceptions as similar. One teacher enthusiastically stated that having time dedicated for small group instruction was a bonus, and as a result, more teachers were targeting individual students' needs. "However, that support can't be just me…it can't end after just 45 or 60 minutes. Tier 3 students are Tier 3 students all day long…not just when they are with me." She ended by stating that one concern she has with RtI is that teachers may not hone their skills in providing differentiated instruction for their students. "I'm also afraid it lifts the weight of the responsibility for meeting their needs…"

The responses to this question provided rich information from different perspectives of teachers serving in different capacities. These personal narratives provided the researcher with a gamut of responses ranging from the impact of RtI upon teacher instructional practices to the impact the model has on student academic achievement. One classroom teacher expressed a concern that RtI would 'go away,' like so many other reforms have. This teacher added, "It's

just sound instructional practice. Students come to us with different experiences and begin at different places academically. We have to meet them where they are."

Impact of RtI Framework on General Classroom

The second research question sought to examine classroom teachers' perception of RtI upon core academic instruction in the general classroom. Most participants perceived RtI generally favorably and emphasized its importance in meeting students' individual academic needs. The participants shared that students' deficits were addressed in small group, skill based interventions with RTI. A significant finding of the current study is that teachers do not perceive the RtI framework as having a connection to or impact upon core academic instruction. One ESL teacher stated the belief that, "RtI is very beneficial when it is used as it is intended. Too many times, though, it's not used that way. I'm not always sure that teachers see the connection to instruction in the classroom. That frustrates me, and I know it frustrates the students. They can be successful in small group, but feel completely unsuccessful back in their classroom. My students are often anxious in their classrooms." This teacher suggested teachers find ways to reduce the affective filter so students can learn from the comprehensible input they receive.

ESL Strategies

Research question three sought to examine teacher's understanding of ESL pedagogy. All ten teacher participants had daily direct contact with English learners. However, only the ESL teachers demonstrated knowledge of strategies known to be effective specifically with English learners. There is substantial research available on good literacy instruction for students in general. Up to a point, these same findings are also applicable for ELs. However, ELs need additional supports, both when they are first learning to read, and later on as they develop more

advanced reading and writing skills, as well as direct instruction in the development of oral language.

Two of the ESL teachers interviewed emphatically discussed the importance of excellent instruction, but cautioned that we needed to go beyond the principles of good instruction and consider cultural and linguistic factors of language development as well. Teacher Three discussed the importance of using a student's first language as being a very important strategy to facilitate second language acquisition and in learning content/skills in that second language. According to Cummins (2001), thoughtful use of a student's native language makes English input comprehensible.

Teacher Eight emphasized the importance of using thoughtfully constructed curricular materials that help build students' language proficiency while teaching them the content they require to meet standards. One ESL teacher participant discussed the importance of having coherent standards to which all students, including ELs, are held, along with well-designed assessments that equitably assess progress toward meeting standards.

Building Language Proficiency and Content Knowledge

Research question four addressed teachers' perceptions of the impact of RtI upon the development of ELs' content knowledge. All participants perceived RtI was indirectly beneficial and had an indirect impact on ELs' academic growth. Students' deficit skills are targeted using various strategies and intervention. Specifically, teachers referred to the benefits of tiered instruction in small, skill based groups perceived in advancing ELs' content knowledge indirectly. Students' academic growth was perceived to be positively affected because areas of challenge are addressed through a progression of individualized and targeted interventions.

One ESL teacher emphasized the importance of teachers' understanding that EL students not be deprived of opportunities to acquire content while they are learning to read, write, speak and listen in English. Another added that content should not be 'watered down,' but the language and instructions should be simplified so that ELs can understand what is being said and what is expected. This teacher stated, "If teachers make their classroom instruction comprehensible, then ELs will not only learn the subject content but they will be acquiring English at the same time. Every teacher who has ELs should consider themselves a language teacher, not just a content teacher."

Conclusions

Five participants perceived RtI met EL students' needs in kindergarten through second grade. Of the ten teachers interviewed, the five participants who expressed the strongest support of RtI also perceived school leadership as supportive and knowledgeable of the framework and ESL methodology. These participants enthusiastically responded that school administration was supportive and played an active role in assuring effective implementation of RtI for every student. Four participants were ambivalent, and one participant stated the opinion that RtI is not effective with ELs. This participant cited two specific cases as evidence of the ineffectiveness of the framework with ELs. Participants perceived they had received adequate professional development training in the logistics and procedures of RtI prior to implementing the framework and monitoring student progress in intervention. However, every participant expressed the need for ESL training and ongoing RtI professional development opportunities. Several participants stated their desire to "know more about special education laws and identification." Every participant was at least basically familiar with assessment procedures to determine if students would benefit from intervention. Six of the ten participants did not indicate they perceived any

connection between the framework and core academic instruction. Each participant perceived RtI as having an indirect impact upon EL students' academic growth. As one participant said, "it's what good teachers did before this new thing…RtI. We found out what the kids needed, where they were, and we would cover the basic skills they needed, so they could move on."

Information gained from interviews provided an insight into teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of the RtI framework with English learners. Analysis of data indicated teachers' perceived RtI was implemented only in the area of reading. One teacher participant mentioned the use of RtI to address deficit math skills. No participant commented on the use of the framework to address the writing process. One participant expressed negative feelings about the reliance upon a single measure, a benchmark test, to identify students for tiered-instruction or monitor student progress. One of the ESL teacher participants was clearly frustrated that ESL teachers were often left out of the discussion about whether ELs should be referred for evaluation for learning disability.

The RtI framework sprang from reforms recommended in IDEIA 2004. Each participant had knowledge of the concept of differentiating and individualizing instruction and monitoring student progress. However, participant responses to several interview questions suggest that teachers generally believe RtI is a special education initiative, a means of identifying students with learning disabilities. Although the interview questions did not address specific interventions, several participants consistently mentioned a specific intervention as synonymous with RtI. These interventions targeted phonemic awareness, decoding, fluency, and comprehension.

Participants easily discussed effective instructional strategies they used with struggling students. When queried specifically about strategies they used with English learners, classroom

and RtI teachers often repeated the same strategies. One ESL teacher, who had previous general education experience expressed the need to go beyond the principles of good instruction. This teacher emphasized the use of unique strategies, building context, and the consideration of cultural and linguistic factors. Follow-up questions about the research basis of strategies indicated that teachers were not aware if the strategies or interventions had been proven effective with ELs.

The findings of the current study reveal that teachers perceived RtI was not singularly effective in meeting the needs of ELs. Participants perceived adequate professional development in procedures and logistics was provided prior to implementation of the framework. Every participant expressed the need for professional development that went "beyond the how" of RtI as well as in ESL pedagogy and special education methodology. One teacher expressed the desire for training which would help her to discern between language acquisition and learning disability. District and school leadership were perceived as essential for effective implementation of the RtI framework. Teachers stated their interpretation of supportive leadership was that leaders went beyond checking boxes on a checklist to actively supporting and being involved in the process and allocating necessary resources.

Some teachers perceived prescribed progress monitoring as time consuming and unrelated to grade level standards. One teacher emphatically discussed the importance of examining progress monitoring data over time, not from data point to data point, when considering academic and linguistic growth of ELs.

Jim Collins (2001) stated, "You absolutely cannot make a series of good decisions without first confronting the brutal facts." The focus must shift from trying to determine what the deficit is within a student to what how the instructional context can be altered to support

learning for every student. Students come to school with unique academic needs but also with unique cultural and linguistic experiences, mindsets about learning, and interests. Highly effective teachers understand the impact of these factors upon student learning and examine their own and institutional instructional and practices to ensure student needs are met.

The findings from this study may inform educators and administrators as they develop future professional development activities. Educators may find this study helpful as they adjust core instruction to meet ELs' needs in the general education classroom.

Summary

This chapter included a discussion on the findings, a summary of each research question, and conclusions. Suggestions from participants were included as were recommendations from the researcher for further study and research. These findings and conclusions were considered representative of teachers' perceptions as it related only to the participants in this study.

The findings of the current study indicate that EL students are often excluded from intervention and timely identification procedures because of factors related to language, culture and academic background. To provide equitable identification of ELs and allow access to interventions, the participants expressed their desire for more professional development and training in distinguishing between challenges arising from the language acquisition proves versus learning disabilities. Some participants expressed the belief that use of assessments in English with students who did not speak English were inappropriate and often resulted in students not receiving services they need.

The findings indicate that research-based intervention and progress monitoring are moderately beneficial practices to support ELs and diminish inappropriate referrals for special education evaluation. This finding is aligned with prior research suggestion that pre-referral

intervention provides more appropriate support and identification of ELs than the previous discrepancy model (Limbos & Geva, 2002; Ortiz & Kushner, 1997; Richards et al., 2006). The findings also indicate that teacher participants felt that additional professional development in the areas of RtI, SLA and ESL methodology as well as special education would be valuable. This is consistent with other studies on the need to provide professional development on RtI and ESL for educators so that every teacher is equipped to instruct, assess and provide necessary support to ELs throughout the day (Greenfield et al., 2010; Orosco & Klingner, 2010). Similarly, this study indicates that ESL teachers would benefit from professional development on RtI and special education policies/learning disabilities.

Although the ESL teachers were knowledgeable about ESL pedagogy, SLA and cultural competencies, they did not feel the inappropriate identification resulted from the implementation of RtI because other teachers lacked necessary training and resources. This is supported by prior research that educators are often unwilling or unable to implement pre-referral interventions with ELs because of lack of knowledge or training to discern between issues arising from language acquisition and learning disability (Conway et al., 20000; Orosco & Klingner, 2010; Sanchez et al., 2010; Wilkinson et al., 2006).

Although IDEIA 2004 addressed the importance of reducing disproportionate EL representation patterns, participants in this study felt that ELs continue to experience patterns of inappropriate or non-referral. Practices should ensure increased collaboration between ESL departments, school administrators, classroom teachers and special education departments as well as monitoring the progress and reviewing evidence documenting academic patterns of struggling ELs. Similarly, some participants in this study felt that assessing ELs in English is inappropriate and invalid, and that refusing to evaluate ELs for learning disability because of

limited English proficiency is discriminatory. Abedi (2003), Donovan & Cross (2002), and Harris-Murri et al. (2006) supported this assertion that administering assessments in English is not valid measurement of EL academic ability and results in disproportionate EL representation in special education programs.

This study adds to existing research of RtI with ELs that found RtI to be ineffective when implemented by educators without knowledge of SLA, ESL pedagogy and sociocultural theory (Greenfield et al., 2010; Orosco & Klingner, 2010; Xu & Drame, 2008).

Recommendations for Further Research

1. Future research should examine in practices used by ESL teachers in the process of documenting progress monitoring and the evidence that ESL teachers collect to demonstrate increased proficiency in English or lack thereof.
2. Future research should examine the differences and similarities in teacher perceptions of the effectiveness of the RtI framework with ELs in small rural districts as compared to larger urban districts.
3. Further study of the need for professional development related to RtI for ESL teachers and special education teachers would be beneficial.
4. This study should be replicated and special education teachers included in the sample to ascertain the impact of their training and experience upon their perceptions of the effectiveness of the RtI framework.
5. A quantitative study should be conducted to determine the significance of the effect of teacher perceptions of effectiveness of RtI with ELs upon referral rate.

Recommendations for Future Practice

1. Teachers should be provided professional development opportunities which include training in ESL methodology, SLA, design of content instruction for ELs.
2. Teachers should be provided training in RtI – beyond the procedures and processes.
3. Teachers would benefit from training in distinguishing between language difference and learning disability.
4. School administrators should be provided with ongoing training which informs and empowers them to nuture a culture which supports students from cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds. This training must address students' socio-cultural and academic needs.

Closing

Schools in the United States have a longstanding record of disproportionately identifying ELs as learning disabled. IDEIA 2004 address the importance of providing equitable and appropriate identification of ELs with learning disability, but it remains to be seen whether this legislation has resulted in equitable and appropriate identification practices with students acquiring English as a second/other language. IDEIA 2004 allowed states the option of using an intervention and progress monitoring framework in identifying students with learning disabilities. This approach was championed as a means to reduce disproportionate EL representation in some special education categories. Scant research has studied educator implementation of frameworks with ELs. The current study aimed to examine teacher perceptions of the effectiveness of the framework and whether IDEIA 2004 has decreased disproportionate representation of ELs in special education programs.

According to Krashen (2003), language is a socially constructed process and a cultural product of the milieu that facilitates social and intellectual experiences. Learning is a socially constructed process that occurs as a result of shared language experiences in a range of social settings. Children's thinking and meaning-making is socially constructed and emerges out of their interactions with their environment (Vygotsky, 1962). The current study provides evidence that teachers perceive the RtI framework as generally beneficial in addressing the needs of struggling English learners. However, teachers also believe that policies and lack of training in linguistically and culturally appropriate instructional strategies for some teachers often result in ELs being precluded from intervention or that the referral and identification process is delayed.

"Schools can make a positive and significant difference for students when educators account for the complex interaction of language, culture, and context, and decisions are made within a coherent theoretical framework" (Miramontes, Nadeau and Cummins 1997, pp. 15). The phrase achievement gap is used frequently in schools today. Darling-Hammond concluded the term assigns responsibility for lower rates of school success on the students and dwells on past poor practices. "Opportunity gap is a much more accurate explanation of what English learners face. It implies looking forward to solving the problem, challenging the status quo, and inviting a conversation about inequities in our schools (Darling-Hammond, 2009).

English learners is the fastest growing demographic in our schools today and has been for the past ten years. The achievement gap between ELs and their English speaking peers is the largest gap amongst subgroups. Thus, general education, special education, ESL teachers and RtI teachers must collaborate to provide support to struggling ELs in a timely manner. States, districts, and universities are urged to provide necessary training to ensure that teachers enter classroom prepared to meet the needs of every student in every classroom every day.

REFERENCES

Aaron, P. G. (1997). The impending demise of the discrepancy formula. Review of Educational Research, 67, 461-502.

Algozzine, B., Ysseldyke, J. E. & Shinn, M. (1982). Identifying children with learning disabilities: When is a discrepancy severe? *Journal of School Psychology, 20*(4), 299-305.

Allington, R., & Walmsley, S. (2007). *No quick fix. Rethinking literacy programs in America's elementary schools, the RTI edition.* New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, Pub. L. No. 111-5, 123 Stat. 115, 516 (2009). Race to the top program: Executive summary. (2011). Washington, DC: U. S. Department of Education. Retrieved from http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/index.html

A nation at risk: The imperative for educational reform (1983), by the National Commission on Excellence in Education. Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, 1983, doi:10.1002/pam.4050030216

Ardoin, S. P., Witt, J. C., Connell, J. E. & Koenig, J. L. (2005). Application of a three-tiered response to intervention model for instructional planning, decision making, and the identification of children in need of services. *Journal of Psychoeducational Assessment, 23*, 362-380.

Artiles, A. J., & Trent, S. C. (1994). Overrepresentation of minority students in special education: A continuing debate. *The Journal of Special Education, 27*(4), 410-437.

Artiles, A.J., & Ortiz, A. A. (Eds.). (2002). *English language learners with special education needs: Identification, assessment, and instruction.* Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics and Delta Systems Co., Inc.

Artiles, A. J. (2003). Special education's changing identity: Paradoxes and dilemmas in views of culture and space. *Harvard Educational Review, 74*, 164-202.

Austin, T. (1995). Goals 2000: The Clinton administration education program. Retrieved August 1, 2016, from http://www3.nd.edu/~rbarger/www7/goals200.html.

Baca, L. M., & de Valenzuela, J. S. (1998). Background and rationale for bilingual special education. In L. M. Baca & H. T. Cervantes (Eds.), *The bilingual special education interface* (pp. 2-25). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Ball, C. & Christ, T. (2012, March). Supporting valid decision making: Uses and misuses of assessment data within the context of RtI. Psychology in the Schools, 49(3), 231-244. doi:10.1002/pits.21592

Barnes, A. C., & Harlacher, J. E. (2008). *Clearing the confusion: Response to intervention as a set of principles*. Education and Treatment of Children, 31, 417–431.

Barrera, I., Corso, R., & MacPherson, D. (2003). Skilled dialogue: Strtegies for responding to cultural diversity in early childhood. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes.

Batsche, G. M., Elliot, J., Garden, J., Grimes, J., Kovaleski, J. F., Prasse, D., Reschly, D. J., Schrag, J., & Tilly III, W. D. (2005). *Response to intervention: Policy considerations and implementation.* Alexandria, VA: National Association of State Directors of Special Education, Inc.

Berkeley, S. B., Bender, W.N., Peasster, L.B. & Saunders, L. (2009). Implementation of response to intervention: A snapshot of progress. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 42*, 85-95.

Bernhard, J., Cummins, J., Campoy, F., da, A., Winsler, A., & Bleiker, C. (2006). Identity texts and literacy development among preschool English language learners: Enhancing learning opportunities for children at risk for learning disabilities. *Teachers College Records, 108*(11), 2380-2405.

Bollman, K. A., Silberglitt, B., and Gibbons, K. A. (2007). The St. Croix River Education District model: Incorporating systems-level organization and a multi-tiered problem-solving process for intervention delivery. *In S. B. Jimerson (Ed.), Handbook of response to intervention: The science and practice of assessment and intervention* (pp. 319-330). New York: Springer.

Bransford, J. D., Brown, A. L., & Cocking, R. (Eds.). (2000). How people learn: Brain, mind, experience and school. Washington DC: National Academy Press. Retrieved July 3, 2016, from http://www.colorado.edu/MCDB/LearningBiology/readings/How-people-learn.pdf

Brown v. Board of Education. 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

Brown, C. L. (2004). Reducing the over-referral of culturally and linguistically diverse students (CLD) for language disabilities. NABE Journal of Research and Practice, 2(1), 225-243.

Burns, M. & Gibbons, K. (2008). *Implementing response-to-intervention in elementary and secondary schools: Procedures to assure scientific based practices.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Capps, R., Fix, M., Murray, J., Ost, J., Passel, J., & Herwantoro, S. (2005). The new demography of America's schools: Immigration and the No Child Left Behind Act. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.

Carrasquillo, A., & Baecher, R. (Eds.). (1990). Retrieved April 5, 2016, from ERIC: https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED396579.

Cirino, P. T., Vaughn, S., Linan-Thompson, S., Cardenas-Hagan, E., Fletcher, J. M., & Francis, D. J. (2009). One-year follow-up outcomes of Spanish and English interventions for English language learners at risk for reading problems. *American Education Research Journal, 46*(3), 744-781.

Collier, C. (2001). *Separating difference from disability.* Ferndale, WA: CrossCultural Developmental Education Services. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 456667).

Committee on Minority Representation in Education. (2002). In S. Donovan & C. Cross (Eds.), Minority students in special and gifted education (pp. 10, 87, 282). National Reasearch Council; Washington, D. C.; National Academy Press.

Conway, D. F., Christensen, J. E., Russell, J. F., & Brown, J. D. (2000). Principals' perceptions of pre-referral student ssistance teams. *Educational Research Service Spectrum, 18*(1), 14-19.

Coutinho, M. J., & Oswald, D. P. (2000). Disproportionate representation in special education: A synthesis and recommendations. *Journal of Child and Family Studies, 9*(2), 135-156.

Crawford, J. (2004). *Educating English learners: Language diversity in the classroom (5th ed.).* Los Angeles, CA: Bilingual Education Services.

Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches (2nd ed.).* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Cummins, J. (1984). *Bilingualism and special education: Issues in assessment and pedagogy.* San Diego, CA: College-Hill Press.

Dandridge, J., Edwards, P., & Pleasants, H. (2004). Making kids winners: new perspectives about literacy from urban elementary school principals. T*he Reading Teacher, 53* (8), 654-662.

Danielson, L., Doolittle, J., & Bradley, R. (2007). Professional development, capacity building, and research needs: Critical issues for response to intervention implementation. School Psychology Review, 36(4), 632-637.

Darling-Hammond, L. (2009). Teaching and the change wars: The professional hypothesis. In A. Hargreaves & M. Fullan (Eds.), Change wars (pp. 45-68). Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree.

Denton, C., Anthony, J., & Hasbrouck, J. (2004, March). Effects of two tutoring trograms on the English reading development of Spanish-English bilingual students. *The Elementary School Journal*, 289-305.

Denton, C. A., Wexler, J., Vaughn, S., & Bryan, D. (2008). Intervention provided to linguistically diverse middle school students with severe reading difficulties. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice, 23*(2), 78-89.

Diana v. California State Board of Education, No. C-70-37 R.F.P. (N.D. Cal., February 3, 1970).

Dudley-Marling, C., & Lucas, K. (2009). Pathologizing the language and culture of poor children. Language Arts, 86(5), 362-370. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/41483561

Dunn, L. M. (1968). Special education for the mildly retarded: Is much of it justifiable? *Exceptional Children, 23,* 5-21.

Dyrcia S. et al. v. Board of Education of the City of New York et al. 557 F. Supp. 1230 (EDNY, 1983).

Echevarria, J., Vogt, M., & Short, D. (2013). *Making content comprehensible for English learners: The SIOP model (4th Ed.).* New York, NY: Pearson.

Education for all Handicapped Children Act of 1975, Pub. L. No. 94-142, § 1400 *et seq.*

Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, Pub. L. No. 89-10, § 20, 79 Stat. 27 (1965).

Etscheidt, S. (2013, December). *Journal of Disability Policy Studies, 24*(3), 181-192.

Etscheidt, S. (2013, March). "Truly Disabled?": An analysis of LD eligibility issues under the individuals with disabilities education act. *Journal of Disability Policy Studies*, 181-192. doi:10.1177/1044207312453323

Federal Register. (2006). Rules and Regulations: 34 CFR Parts 300 and 301. Assistance to states for the education of children with disabilities and preschool grants for children with disabilities. *Federal Register, 71,* 46540-46845.

Ferlis, E., & Xu, Y. (2016). Prereferral process with Latino English language learners with specific learning disabilities: Perceptions of English as a second language teachers. *International Journal of Multicultural Education*, 18(3), 22-39. Retrieved from http://ijme-journal.org/ijme/index.php/ijme/article/view/1113>.

Figueroa, R. A., & Newsome, P. (2006). The diagnosis of LD in English language learners: Is it nondiscriminatory? *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 39, 206-214.

Finn, C. E. (2002). Reinventing special education. *The Education Gadfly, 2*(26), 2-3. Retrieved from www.edexcellence.net

Fletcher, J. M., Francis, D. J., Shaywitz, S. E., Lyon, G. R., Foorman, B. R., Stuebing, K. K., et al. (1998). Intelligent testing and the discrepancy model for children with learning disabilities. *Learning Disabilities Research and Practice*, 13, 186–203

Foster, L. (2004). Great expectations: Reflections on the 50th anniversary of Brown v. Board of Education. *Principal Leadership (Middle School Ed.), 4*(49), 44-8.

Fraenkel, J. R., Wallen, N. E., & Hyun, H.H. (2012). *How to design and evaluate research in education.* New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

Fuchs, D., Mock, D., Morgan, P., & Young, C. (2003). Responsiveness to intervention: Definitions, evidence and implicatons for the learning disability construct. *Learning Disablities Research & Practice, 18*(3), 157-171.

Fuchs, D., & Fuchs, L. S. (2006). Introduction to response to intervention: What, why, and how valid is it? *Reading Research Quarterly, 41*(1), 93-99. Retrieved from http://search.proquest.com/docview/212122539?accountid=10771

Fuchs, L. S., & Fuchs, D. (2006). A framework for building capacity for responsiveness to intervention. *School Psychology Review, 35*(4), 621-626.

Fuchs, L. S., Fuchs, D., Compton, D. L., Bryant, J. D., Hamlett, C. L., & Seethaler, P. M. (2007). Mathematics screening and progress monitoring at first grade: Implications for responsiveness to intervention. *Exceptional Children, 73*, 311–330.

Fuchs, L., Fuchs, D., & Zumeta, R. (2008). Response to intervention: A strategy for the prevention and identification of learning disabilities. In E. Grigorenko (Ed.), *Educating individuals with disabilities: IDEIA 2004 and beyond* (pp. 115-135). New York: Springer Publishing.

Garcia, E., & Cuellar, D. (2006). Who are these linguistically and culturally diverse students? *Teachers College Record, 108*(11), 2220-2246.

Gessler-Werts, M., Lambert, M., & Carpenter, E. (2009). What special education directors say about RtI. *Learning Disability Quarterly, 32*, 245-254.

Gilbert, J. C., Compton, D., Fuchs, D., & Fuchs, L. (2012). Early screening for risk of reading disabilities: Recommendations for a four-step screening system. *Assessment for Effective Intervention, 38*(1), 6-14.

Gilbertson, D., & Bluck, J. (2006). Improving responsiveness to intervention for English-language learners: A comparison of instructional pace on letter naming rates. *Journal of Behavioral Education, 15*(3), 131-147.

Gilbertson, D., Maxfield, J. & Hughes, J. (2007, September). Evaluating responsiveness to intervention for English language learners: A comparison of response modes on letter naming rates. *Journal of Behavioral Education, 16*(3), 259-279. doi:10.1007/s10864-007-9039-9

Glesne, C. (1999). *Becoming qualitative researchers* (2nd ed.). New York: Addison Wesley Longman, Inc.

Gloecker, L. C. (2003). The feasibility and consequences of implementing RtI: A discussion of papers presented by Reschly and Gerber. Paper presented at the National Research Center on Learning Disabilities Responsiveness-to-Intervention Symposium, Kansas City, MO.

Goals 2000: Educate America Act, P. L. 103-227.

Gonzalez, N., Moll, L. C., & Amanti, C. (Eds.) (2005). Funds of knowledge: Theorizing practices in households, communities, and classrooms. [Kindle version].

Graham, E. (2009). *Public school education – the case for reduced class size: Why the present class size is not working and what can we do about it?* Retrieved June 10, 2016, from: http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED503690.pdf

Greenfield, R., Rinaldi, C., Proctor, P. & Cadarelli, A. (2010) Teachers' perceptions of a response to intervention (RTI) reform effort in an urban elementary school: A consensual qualitative analysis. Journal of Disability Policy Studies. 21(1) 47-63. doi: 10.1177/1044207310365499

Gunn, B., Biglan, A., Smolkowski, K., & Ary, D. (2000). The efficacy of supplemental instruction in decoding skills for Hispanic and non-Hispanic students in early elementary school. *The Journal of Special Education, 34*(2), 90-103.

Gunn, B., Smolkowski, K., Biglan, A., & Black, C. (2002). Supplemental instruction in decoding skills for Hispanic and non- Hispanic students in early elementary school: A follow-up. *The Journal of Special Education, 36*(2), 69-79.

Gunn, B., Smolkowski, K., Biglan, A., & Black, C., & Blair, J. (2005). Fostering the development of reading skill through supplemental instruction: Results for Hispanic and non- Hispanic students. *The Journal of Special Education, 39*(2), 66-85.

Gutierrez-Clellan, V.F. (2005). Assessment of English language learners: Challenges and strategies. *Head Start Bulletin*, 78, pp. 47-49.

Gutierrez, K. D., Morales, P. Z., & Martinez, D. C. (2009). Re-mediating literacy: Culture, difference, and learning for students from nondominant communities. *Review of Research in Education, 33*(1), 212–245. doi: 10.3102/0091732X08328267

Gutierrez, K. D., & Rogoff, B. (2003, June). Cultural ways of learning: Individual traits or repertoires of practice. *Educational Research, 32*(5), 19-25.

Hallahan, D. P., & Mock, D. R. (2003). A brief history of the field of learning disabilities. In H. L. Swanson, K. R. Harris, & S. Graham (Eds.), *Handbook of Learning Disabilities* (pp. 16-30). New York: The Guilford Press.

Hardin, B., Mereoiu, M., Hung, H. & Roach-Scott, M. (2009). Investigating parent and professional perspectives concerning special education services for preschool Latino children. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 37*(2), 93-102.

Harlacher, J., Potter, J. & Weber, J. (2015). A team-based approach to improving core instructional reading practices within response to intervention. *Intervention in School and Clinic, 50*(4), 210-220.

Harris-Murri, N., King, K., & Rostenberg, D. (2006). Reducing disproportionate minority representation in special education programs for students with emotional disturbances:

Toward a culturally responsive response to intervention model. *Education and Treatment of Children, 29*(4), 779-799.

Hehir, T. (2002). IDEA and disproportionality: Federal enforcement, effective advocacy, and strategies for change. In D. Losen & G. Orfield (Eds.), *Racial inequity in special education* (pp. 219-238). Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Heller, K., Holtzman, W., & Messick, S. (1982). *Placing children in special education: A strategy for equity.* Washington DC: National Academy of Science Press.

Hintze, J. M. (2008). *Conceptual and empirical issues of RtI: Developing a response to intervention framework.* University of Massachusetts.

Hollenbeck, A. F. (2007). From IDEA to implementation: A discussion of the foundational and future responsiveness to intervention research. *Learning Disabilities Research and Practice 22*(2), 137-146.

Hoover, J. B., Baca, L., Wexler-Love, E., Saenz, L. (2008). *National implementation of response to intervention: Research summary*. Boulder: University of Colorado.

Hosp, J., & Madyun, N. H. (2007). Addressing Disproportionality with Response to Intervention: the science and practice of assessment and interve. In S. R. Jimerson, M. K. Burns, & A. M. VanDerHeyden (Eds.), *Response to Intervention Handbook: the science and practice of assessment and intervention*. 72-181. New York, NY: Springer.

Hoy, W. & Miskel, C. (2013). *Educational Administration: Theory, Research and Practice (9th ed*.). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997, Pub. L. No 94-142, 89 Stat. 773 (as amended), renamed IDEA, Pub. L. No 101-476, 104 Stat. 1143 [codified as amended at 20 U.S.C. § 1400 *et seq.*] (1994), amended by the IDEA Amendments of 1997, Pub. L. No. 105-17.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990, Pub. L. 102-119, 20 U.S.C. § 1400 *et seq.*

Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, Pub. L. No. 108-446 (118 Stat. 2647 2004). Retrieved October 5, 2015, from http://frwebgate.access.gpogov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=108_cong_public_laws&docid=f:publ446.108.pdf

Jitendra, A. K., & Rohena-Diaz, E. (1996). Language assessment of students who are linguistically diverse: Why a discrete approach is not the answer. *School Psychology Review, 25*(1), 40-56.

Kame'enui, E.,J. (2007). A new paradigm: Responsiveness to intervention. Teaching Exceptional Children, 39(5), 6-7. Retrieved from https://login.iris.etsu.edu:3443/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.iris.etsu.edu:2048/docview/201153217?accountid=10771

Kea, C. D., & Utley, C. A. (1998). To teach me is to know me. *Journal of Special Education, 32*(1), 44–47.

Keller-Allen, C. (2006, August). English language learners with disabilities: Identification and other state policies and issues. *Project Forum at NASDSE,* 2-14.

Kirk, S., & Bateman, B. (1962). Diagnosis and remediation of learning disabilities. *Exceptional Children*, unknown volume(issue), 70-71.

Klingner, J. K., & Artiles, A. J. (2003). When should bilingual students be in special education? *Educational Leadership*, 61(2), 66-71.

Klingner, J. K., Artiles, A. J., Kozleski, E., Harry, B., Zion, S., Tate, W., Duran, G. Z., & Riley, D. (2005). Addressing the disproportionate representation of culturally and linguistically diverse students in special education through culturally responsive educational systems. Education Policy Analysis Archives, 13(38).

Klingner, J. K., & Edwards, P. (2006). Cultural considerations with response to intervention models. Reading Research Quarterly, 41, 108-117.

Klingner, J. K., & Harry, B. (2006). The special education referral and decision-making process for English language learners: Child study team meetings and placement conferences. Teachers College Record, 108, 2247-2281.

Klingner, J. K., Artiles, A. J., & Barletta, L. M. (2006). English language learners who struggle with reading: Language acquisition or LD? Journal of Learning Disabilities, 39(2), 108-128.

Kushner, M. (2008). Preparing highly qualified teachers for English language learners with disabilities and at risk of disabilities. Multiple Voices for Ethnically Diverse Exceptional Learners, 11(1), 42-57.

Lake, V., & Pappamihiel, N. (2003). Effective practices and principles to support English learners in the early childhood classroom. *Childhood Education, 79*(4), 200-203.

Larry P. v. Riles, (1972/1974/1979/1984/1986).

Lesaux, N. K. (2006). Building consensus: Future directions for research on English language learners at risk for learning difficulties. Teachers College Record, 108, 2406-2438.

Linan-Thompson, S., Cirino, P. T., & Vaughn, S. (2006). Determining English language learners' response to intervention: Questions and some answers. *Learning Disabilities Quarterly, 30*, 185-195.

Linan-Thompson, S., & Ortiz, A. A. (2009). Response to Intervention and Englishlanguage learners: Instructional and assessment considerations. *Seminars in Speech & Language, 30*(2), 105-120.

Lipson, &. Wisxon, K. (2012). To what interventions are students responding? *The Reading Teacher, 44*(2), 5-13. doi:10.1002/TRTR.01110

Lynch, E. W. & Hanson, M. J. (2004). *Developing cross-cultural competence: A guide for working with young children and their families* (3rd ed.). Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brooks.

Madden, N. A., Slavin, R. E., Karweit, N. L., Dolan, L., & Wasik, B. A. (1991). Success for all. Phi Delta Kappan, 72, 593-599.

Mandinach, E. & Jackson, S. (2012). *Transforming teaching and learning through data-driven making: Classroom insights from educational psychology* (1st ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA, U.S.: Corwin.

Marshal, C. & Rossman, G. (1999). *Designing Qualitative Research.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Mandinach, E. & Jackson, S. (2012). *Transforming teaching and learning through data-driven making: Classroom insights from educational psychology (1st ed.)*. Thousand Oaks, CA, U.S.: Corwin.

Mastropieri, M. & Scruggs, T. (2005). Feasibility and consequences of response to intervention: Examination of the issues and scientific evidence as a model for the identification of individuals with learning disabilities. *Journal of Learning Disabilities 38*(6), 525-531.

McMillan, J. H. & Schumacher, S. (2006). *Research in education: Evidence-based inquiry* (6th ed.). Boston: Pearson Education, Inc.

Mercer, J. (1973). *Labeling the mentally retarded: Clinical and social system perspectives on mental retardation.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Merriam, S. (2009). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook (3rd ed.).* Thousand Oaks, CA. U.S.: Sage Publications.

Miles, M., Huberman, A. & Saldana, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook (3rd ed.).* Thousand Oaks, CA. U.S.: Sage Publications.

Miller, M., Strosnider, R., & Dooley, E. (2002). States' requirements for teachers' preparation for diversity. *Multicultural Education, 8*(2), 15-18.

Monroe, M. (1932). *Children who cannot read: The analysis of reading disabilities and the use of diagnostic tests in the instruction of retarded readers.* Chicago: University of Chicago.

Morrier, M., Irving, M., Dandy, E., Dmitriyev, G., & Ukejo, I. (2007). Teaching and learning within and across cultures: Educator requirements across the United States. *Multicultural Education 15(*1*),* 32-40.

National Association of State Directors of Special Education, Incorporated & Council of Administrators of Special Education (2006). Response to intervention: NASDSE and CASE white paper on RtI.

National Center for Education Statistics. (2002). The 1999-2000 schools and staffing survey. . Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement.

National Center for Educational Statistics. (2004). English language learners in U.S. public schools: 1994 and 2000. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement.

National Center for Educational Statistics. (2007). Status and trends in the education of racial and ethnic minorities. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement.

National Center for Education Statistics. (2009). The condition of education. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement.

National Center on Response to Intervention. (March 2010). *Essential Components of RTI-A Closer Look at Response to Intervention.* Retrieved from National Center on Response to Intervention: http://www.rti4success.org/resource/essential-components-rti-closer-look-response-intervention

National Center on Student Progress Monitoring. (n.d.). Retrieved October 2015, from Student Progress Monitoring: http://www.studentprogress.org

National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language Instruction Educational Programs. (2006). The growing numbers of Limited English Proficient students 1996/96-2005/06. Retrieved from http://www.ncela.us/sources-english-learner-el-data

National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers. (2010). Common Core State Standards Initiative: About the standards (2015). Retrieved Common Core State Standards Initiative website: http://www.corestandards.org/about-the-standards/

National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. (2000). *Report of the National Reading Panel. Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction* (NIH Publication No. 00-4769). Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office. Retrieved from: http://www.nichd.nih.gov/publications/nrp/smallbook.html

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, Pub. L. No.107-110, 115 Stat. 1425 (2002) Retrieved from: http://www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/index.html

Nunkoosing, K. (2005). The problem with interviews. *Qualitative Health Research 15*(5), 698-706. DOI: 10.1177/1049732304273903

Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education. (1997). *Nineteenth annual report to Congress on the implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.* Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education. (2001). *Twenty-third annual report to Congress on the implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.* Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education. (2002). *Twenty-fourth annual report to Congress on the implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.* Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education. (2007). *Twenty-ninth annual report to Congress on the implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.* Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Olsen, L. (2013). Advancing the language and literature of English learners in an era of the common core standards. *California Association of Bilingual Eucaton.* Retrieved October 5, 2016

Orosco, M. J. & Klingner, J. (2010). One school's implementation of RTI with English language learners: "Referring into RTI." *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 43*(3), 269-288.

Ortiz, A. (2002). Prevention of school falure and early intervention for English language learners. In A. J. Artiles & A. A. Ortiz (Eds.). *English language learners with special needs: Identification, assessment, and instruction* (pp. 31-48). Washington, D. C.: Center for Applied Linguistics.

Ovando, C. J., Combs, M. C., Collier, V. P. (2006). *Bilingual & ESL classrooms: Teaching multicultural contexts.* New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

Pacheco, R. (1983). Bilingual mentally retarded children: Language confusion or real deficits? In D. R. Omark & J. K. Erickson (Eds.*), The bilingual exceptional child* (pp.233-53). San Diego, CA: College-Hill Press.

Palinscar, A. S. & Brown, A. L. (1984). Reciprocal teaching of comprehension: Fostering and monitoring comprehension activities. *Cognition and Instruction 11*(2), 117-175.

Patton, M. (2014). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

PCESE: President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education. (2002). *A new era: Revitalizing special education for children and their families.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

Peisner-Fienberg, E. S. (2007). *Evaluation of the North Carolina More at Four Pre-K Program.* Child Development Institute, Frank Porter Graham. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina.

Porter, L. J., (2008). *A case study of the implementation of response to intervention in an elementary school.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, George Washington University.

Preventing School Failure, Vol. 47, Number 2, Winter 2003 Published by Heldref Publications, 1319 18th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20036-1802 Copyright 2003

Race to the top program: Executive summary. (2011). Washington, D. C.: U. S. Department of Education. Retrieved September 2015, from http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/index.html

Reschly D. J. & Hosp, J. L. (2003). Referral rates for intervention or assessment: A meta-analysis of racial differences. *Journal of Special Education, 37*(2), 67-80.

Reschly, D. & Bergstrom, M. (2009). Response to intervention. In T. &. Gutkin (Ed.), The handbook of school psychology (pp. 434-460). New York: Wiley.

Rhodes, R., Ochoa, S., & Ortiz, S. (2005). *Assessing culturally and linguistically diverse students: A practical guide.* New York: Guildord Publications.

Rinaldi, C., & Samson, J. (2008). English language learners and response to intervention: Referral recommendations. Teaching Exceptional Children, 40(5), 6-14.

Robertson, P., Kushner, M. I., Starks, J., & Drescher, C. (1994). An update of participation rates of culturally and linguistically diverse students in special education: The need for a research and policy agenda. The Bilingual Special Education Perspective, 14(1), 3-9.

Rodriquez, R. F. (1982). The Mexican American child in special education. ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools. Washington, DC: National Institute of Education.

Rubin, H. J. & Rubin, I. S. (2005). *Qualitative interviewing - The art of hearing data (2nd ed.).* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Santangelo, T. (2009). *Collaborative* problem solving effectively implemented, but not sustained: A case for aligning the sun, the moon, and the stars. *Exceptional Children, 75*(2), 195-209.

Scanlon, D. Anderson, Sweeney. (2010). *Early Intervention for Reading Difficulties: The Interaction Strategies Approach.* New York: Guilford Press.

Shinn, M., Ysseldyke, S., Deno, S., & Tindal, G. (1986). A comparison of differences between students labeled learning disabled and low achieving on measures of classroom performance. Journal of Learning Disabilities, 19(9), 544-552. Retrieved January 7, 2017.

Shinn, R. M., Anderson, K., & Sweeney, J. (2007). Identifying students at risk, monitoring performance, an determining eligibility within response to intervention: Research on educational need and benefit from academic intervention. *School Psychology Review, 36*(4), 601-617.

Shippen, M., Curtis, R., & Miller, A. (2009, July). A qualitative analysis of teachers' and counselors' perceptions of the overrepresentation of African Americans in special education. *Teacher Education and Special Education, 32*(3), 226-238.

Smith, J.A., Flowers, P. & Larkin, M. (2009). Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Theory, method and research. London: Sage.

Speece, D. L., Case, L. P. and Molloy, D. E. (2003), Responsiveness to General Education Instruction as the First Gate to Learning Disabilities Identification. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice, 18*(3), 147–156. doi:10.1111/1540-5826.00071

Speece, D., & Walker, C. (2007). What are the issues in response to intervention research? Evidence Based Reading Practices for Response to Intervention: Baltimore, London, & Sydney: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.

Tabors, P. (1997). *One child, two languages: A guide for preschool educators of children learning English as a second language.* Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.

Tharp, R., Estrada, R., Dalton, S., & Yamauchi, L. (2000). *Teaching transformed: Achieving excellence, fairness, inclusion, and harmony.* Boulder: Westview Press.

The National Reading Panel. (2001). Retrieved October 15, 2015, from http://nationalreadingpanel.org/NRPAbout/about_nrp.htm

Tomlinson, C. (2014). *The differentiated classroom: Responding to the needs of all learners.* Alexandria: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Torgensen, J. K. (1989). Why IQ is relevant to the definition of learning disabilities. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 22*(8), 484-486.

Trent, S., Kea, C., & Oh, K. (2008, April). Preparing preservice educators for cultural diversity: How far have we come? *Exceptional Children, 74*(3), 328-350. doi:10.1177/001440290807400304

Tubpun, T. (2012). General Education and Special Education Teachers' Beliefs and Perceptions of Skills for Response to Intervention (RTI). (Doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconson-Madison, 2012). ProQuest, ED541757. Retrieved from: http://www.proquest.com/en-US/products/dissertations/individuals.shtml

U. S. Department of Eduction. (2003). Key indicators of Hipanic student achievement: Ntional goals and benchmarks for the next decade. Retrieved from: http://www.ed.gov/pubs/hispanicindiators/

VanDerHeyden, A. & Codding, R. (2014). Practical effects of classwide mathematics intervention. *School Psychology Review, 44*(2), 169-190. Retrieved from http://search.proquest.com/docview/1718987917?accountid=10771

Vaughn, S., & Fuchs, L. (2003). Redefining learning disabilities as inadequate response to instruction: The promise and potential problems. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice, 18*(3), 137-146.

Vaughn, S., Linan-Thompson, S., Mathes, P. G., Cirino, P. T., Carlson, C. D., Pollard-Durodola, S. D., Cardenas-Hagan, E., & Francis, D. J. (2006). Effectiveness of Spanish interventions for first-grade English language learners at risk for reading difficulties. Journal of Learning Disabilities, 39(1), 56-73.

Vaughn, S., Mathes, P. G., Linan-Thompson, S., & Francis, D. (2005). Teaching English language learners at risk for reading disabilities to read: Putting research into practice. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice, 20*(1), 58-67.

Vaughn, S., Wanzek, J., Murray, C. S., Scammacca, N., Linan-Thompson, S., & Woodruff, A. (2009). Response to early reading intervention: Examining higher and lower responders. *Exceptional Children, 75*(2), 165-183.

Vellutino, F. R., Scanlon, D. M., & Lyon, G. R. (2000). Differentiating between difficult to remediate and readily remediated poor readers. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 33*(3), 223-238.

Vellutino, F. R., Scanlon, D. M., Zhang, H., & Schatschneider, C. (2008). Using response to kindergarten and first grade intervention to identify children at-risk for long term reading difficulties. *Reading and Writing, 21*(4), 437-480.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Thought and language.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Walker, D. W., & Daves, D. (2010). Response to intervention and the courts: Litigation-based guidance. *Journal of Disability Policy Studies, 21*(1), 40-46.

Wayman, J. C., & Stringfield, S. (2006). Technology-supported involvement of entire faculties in examination of student data for instructional improvement. *American Journal of Education 112*(4), 549–571.

Wertsch, J. V. (2005). Making human beings human: Bioecological perspectives on human development. The British Journal of Developmental Psychology, 23, 143-151. Retrieved from https://login.iris.etsu.edu:3443/login?url= http://search.proquest.com.iris.etsu.edu:2048/docview/218738585?accountid=10771

Wilkinson, C., Ortiz, A., Robertson, P., & Kushner, M. (2006). English language learners with reading-related LD: Linking data from multiple sources to make eligibility determinations. Journal of Learning Disabilities, 39(2), 129-141.

Wiley, H., & Deno, S. L. (2005). Oral reading and maze measures as predictors of success for English learners on a state standards assessment. Remedial and Special Education, 26(4), 207-214. Retrieved from https://login.iris.etsu.edu:3443/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.iris.etsu.edu:2048/docview/236331678?accountid=10771.

Will, M. (1986). Educating students with learning problems: A shared responsibility. A report to the secretry. Retrieved July 8, 2016, from the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services: United States Department of Education.

Woodward, J. (2004). Mathematics reform in the U.S.: Past to Present. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 37*(1) 30-35.

Wright, W. E., & Choi, D. (2006). The impact of language and high-stakes testing policies on elementary school English language learners in Arizona. *Education Policy Analysis Archives, 14*, 1–75.

Wright, W. D., & Wright, P. D. (2007). Special education law. Hartfield, VA: Harbor House Law Press.

Wright, P., & Wright, P. (1998/2010). Wrights law website. Retrieved September 28, 2016, from http://www.wrightslaw.com

Xu, M. A., & Storr, G. B. (2012). Learning the concept of researcher as instrument in qualitative research. *The Qualitative Report, 17*(21), 1-18. Retrieved from http://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqu/vol17/iss21/2

Xu, Y., & Drame, E. (2008). Culturally appropriate context: Unlocking the potential of Response to Intervention for English language learners. Early Childhood Education, 35, 305-311.

Zirkel, P. (2014). The trend in SLD enrollments and the role of RTI. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 473-479. doi:10.1177/0022219413495297

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Dear XXXXXX County (ESL/RtI or Classroom)Teacher,

I need your help! I am a doctoral student at East Tennessee Status University, and I would like to invite you to participate in a research study at your school, _____Elementary. The purpose of this study is to explore teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of the Response to Invention (RtI) framework with English learners. This study also seeks to understand what intervention strategies are most/least effective with English learners'. Lastly, the study is also intended to examine the impact the RtI model has on English learners' performance in the general education classroom. The research study will begin in March and will continue through April. Each participant will be interviewed individually at a location/time you choose. The interviews that should last approximately 45-60 minutes. All interviews will be recorded and transcripts of your interview will be available to you to check for accuracy.

If you would be interested in being part of this research study, please contact me (Donna Stapleton) via email at stapletond@XXXXXXXXcounty.org or call my cell phone number @ XXXXXXX.

I look forward to talking with you.

Thank you for your time,

Donna Stapleton

Doctoral Student

East Tennessee State University

APPENDIX B

Stakeholder Consent Form

Principal Investigator's Contact Information: Donna Stapleton
Cell phone: [redacted]
E-mail: stapletond@goldmail.etsu.edu

Organization of Principal Investigator: East Tennessee State University

INFORMED CONSENT

This informed consent will explain an individual's participation in a research study. It is important that your read this information carefully before you decide whether or not you would like to participate in this study.

A. Purpose: The purpose of this research study

To examine teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of the Response to Intervention framework with English Learners.

B. Duration:

The duration of this study will last no more than four months. As a participant, your involvement will be limited to one interview, lasting approximately 45 minutes.

C. Procedures: The procedures which will involve you, as a participant in this study, will include:

The study will involve 10 participants each of whom will be asked questions according to an established interview protocol in individual face to face interview sessions. Each interview will last approximately 45 minutes.

D. Alternative Procedures/Treatments: The alternative procedures/treatments available to you if you elect not to participate in this research are:

Risks for participating in this study are minimal. There are no alternative procedures or treatments to this study.

E. Possible Risks/Discomforts: The possible risks and/or discomforts from your participation in this research study include:

There are no known risks/discomforts that participants are expected to experience as a result of your participation in this study.

F. Possible Benefits: The possible benefits of your participation in this research study are:

While there are no direct, individual, personal benefits to you from participating in this study, the finding from the study could influence your professional teaching practice.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in this research experiment is voluntary. ***You may choose* not *to participate.*** If you decide to participate in this research study you can change your mind and stop

at any time. If you choose not to participate, or change your mind during the process, there will be no change in the benefits or treatments to which you are entitled. At any time if you choose not to participate or wish to discontinue your participation during the process, you may do so. If you choose to discontinue your participation after you have been interviewed, please call or e-mail Donna Stapleton, at telephone number: 865-816-4398; e-mail: stapletond@etsu.edu. Audio recordings and interview transcripts will be destroyed if you choose to end your participation. You will be told if any of the results of the study should reasonably be expected to make you change your mind about continuing to participate.

G. Contact for Questions: If you have any questions, concerns or research-related problems throughout the process, you may call Donna Stapleton at telephone number [redacted]. You may also call the Chairman of the ETSU Institutional Review Board at 423-439-6054 for any questions you may have about your rights as a research participant. If you have any questions or concerns about the research and want to talk to someone independent of the research team, you may call an IRB Coordinator at 423-439-6055 or 423-439-6002.

H. Confidentiality: Every attempt will be made to see that your privacy is protected and your study results are kept confidential. A copy of the records from this study (using pseudonyms) will be stored in a locked cabinet in Donna Stapleton's residence for at least 5 years after this study has ended. The results of this study may be published and/or presented publically without identifying you as a participant. Although your rights and privacy will be maintained the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services and Donna Stapleton and the research team will have access to the study records. Your rights will not be abridged not your privacy compromised unless required by law, or as described in this form**.**

I. Recording: The interview will be recorded.

You will be provided a signed copy of this inform consent document.

By signing below, I confirm that I have read and understand this Informed Consent Document and that I had the opportunity to have the process explained to me orally.

I confirm that I have had the opportunity to ask questions and that all my questions have been answered.

By signing below, I confirm that I freely and voluntarily choose to take part in this research study.

_____	_____
Signature of Participant	Date
_____	_____
Printed Name of Participant	Date
_____	_____
Signature of Principal Investigator	Date
_____	_____
Signature of Witness	Date

APPENDIX C

Interview Protocol

1. In what position are you currently serving? How long have you been teaching? What teaching experiences have you had?

2. What are your overarching perceptions of the effectiveness of the Response to Intervention framework. How do you perceive your understanding of the process?
   a. What do you think the school district is doing well in relation to Response to Intervention?
   b. What do you think may not be working in the district when it comes to Response to Intervention?

3. What do you believe is the purpose of Response to Intervention?

4. Please tell me what you know about the Response to Intervention process.
   If I were not familiar with the field of public education or the concept of Response to Intervention, how would you describe this process to me?

5. What training have you received on the implementation of RtI? Please describe the training including who provided the training, the frequency duration and whether you feel it has been sufficient.

6. Describe your experiences as a member of your grade level RtI Data Team.

7. Have you taken any special education classes or received professional development related to the identification of learning disabilities?

8. What experiences have you had teaching English learners? What preparation did you receive for teaching ELs? What training have you received in working with ELs? Please describe the training including who provided the training, the frequency duration and whether you feel it has been sufficient.

9. What is your knowledge of the Response to Intervention process related to English learners?

10. Take a moment to think about any policies or procedures that would dictate your instruction of English learners. Please share these policies and procedures and what implementing these policies and procedures would look like in your classroom.

11. What do you perceive are effective instructional practices to use with students who are English learners?
    a. What do you think the school district is doing well related to instruction for English learners?
    b. What do you think may not be working in the district when it comes to instruction for English learners?

12. What instructional strategies, supports or assessments do you use with struggling ELs? How do you monitor their progress?

13. What is your perception of assessment practices as they relate to students who are English learners?
    a. What do you think the school district is doing well related to assessments for English learners?
    b. What do you think may not be working in the district when it comes to assessments for English learners?

14. Have you ever suspected an EL in your classroom of having a learning disability?
    a. What characteristics might indicate an EL has a learning disability?
    b. How do you distinguish between language acquisition challenges and possible learning disability for ELs?

15. What do you think are the most effective instructional practices to use with an ELs? What about ELs who shows signs of having a learning disability?

16. Think about referrals for evaluation you have been involved in for struggling English learners. Describe this experience. What is the most challenging aspect of the identification or support process for educators?

17. How effective do you perceive the Response to Intervention framework is in addressing the needs of struggling ELs?

VITA

DONNA CARTWRIGHT STAPLETON

Education:	B.S.: IS/English, University of Texas – Edinburg, TX
	M.S.: Counseling Psychology, California Lutheran University – Thousand Oaks, CA 1999
	M.A.: Educational Leadership, California Lutheran University – Thousand Oaks, CA 1999
	Ed.D.: Educational Leadership, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee 2017
Professional Experience:	Principal – Loudon County Schools (2014 – Present)
	Title III Specialist/Supervisor – Knox County Schools (2011 – 2014)
	Principal – Simi Valley Unified School District (2008 – 2011)
	Assessment & Categorical Programs Supervisor – Simi Valley Unified School District (2005 – 2008)